

EVIL LORDS

*Theories and Representations of Tyranny
from Antiquity to the Renaissance*



Edited by

NIKOS PANOU & HESTER SCHADEE

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EVIL LORDS

Introduction

TYRANNY AND BAD RULE IN THE PREMODERN WEST

Hester Schadee and Nikos Panou



‘TYRANNY IS THE normal pattern of human government’—so stated Adlai Stevenson, the eloquent politician and diplomat who twice ran for US president.¹ This pithy phrase was not intended as an indictment of human nature or of the corrupting effects of power, but rather as a tribute to the intelligence of constitutional mechanisms that divide and circumscribe political authority. Without these checks and balances to prevent or minimize abuse of power, government, Stevenson implied, ipso facto equals tyranny. From this perspective, the political history of the premodern West is essentially a history of tyranny, until a legal-political technology—constitutionalism—provided the means to create an alternative. Leo Strauss, on the other hand, called tyranny ‘a danger coeval with political life’.² While agreeing on the ubiquity of bad rule, this observation suggests that tyranny is not a historical phase in political evolution but rather a condition that asserts itself at different times and in a variety of circumstances. In Strauss’s view, there is therefore no long-term systemic solution to tyranny; instead, it is an ever-present danger, lurking under the surface of ostensibly well-organized states.

If the political catastrophes of the twentieth century spurred considerations of tyranny in modern states, evil lords—or at least flawed rulers—have demonstrably

¹ Adlai Stevenson II, cited in F. Oakley, *Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment*, Oxford, 2006, p. 4.

² L. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, eds V. Gourevitch and M. S. Roth, corr. and exp. edn, Chicago, 2013, p. 22.

exercised the minds of men since the advent of written literature. The epic hero Gilgamesh, to name but one, was a source of fear and violence before he transformed into a good king. Two different types of problematic rulers are introduced in the *Iliad*, as the narrative inexorably unfolds from a clash between autocratic arrogance and heroic intransigence. Subsequent poets, historians, philosophers, theologians, orators, satirists, and educators of all sorts have addressed the topic of bad rule as much as, if not more than, that of good government. Much of this literature is didactic or hortatory in nature, seeking to counter or mitigate bad rule through education. Some of it examines the evil lord as a device through which his positive counterpart may be defined. Many texts are diagnostic, in that they offer scripts for recognizing and dealing with tyrannical administration. Some may even be apotropaic. But what all these writings have in common is a concern with how political societies should be administrated, and with the ways in which reality can or does fall short of these ideals.

The present volume uses the prism of tyranny or bad rule—the distinctions and overlap of both terms will be discussed below—to generate a better understanding of political discourse from the ancient world to the Renaissance. This topic has received less scholarly attention than theories of the good ruler or the ideal state, particularly in a cross-chronological framework.³ Yet, paraphrasing Tolstoy, one could claim that good lords are all alike, whereas bad ones tend to be bad in their own particular ways: that is to say, their misdeeds—and the manners of their evaluation—may be more tellingly specific than those of their better halves. For instance, bad or tyrannical governance, as Strauss and Stevenson suggest, may be attributed to human or systemic causes, identified pragmatically or in legal terms, and conceived

³ The most recent contributions on premodern monarchical ideals include *Le savoir du prince. Du Moyen Âge aux Lumières*, ed. R. Halévi, Paris, 2002; *Le prince au miroir de la littérature politique de l'Antiquité aux Lumières*, eds F. Lachaud and L. Scordia, Mont-Saint-Aignan, 2007; *Concepts of Kingship in Antiquity: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop Held in Padova, November 28th–December 1st, 2007*, eds G. Lanfranchi and R. Rollinger, Padua, 2010; *Le roi fontaine de justice. Pouvoir justicier et pouvoir royal au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*, eds S. Menegaldo and B. Ribémont, Paris, 2012; and *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, eds L. Mitchell and C. Melville, Leiden/Boston, 2013. On tyranny (sometimes including 'bad rule'), see primarily R. Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny, from Plato to Arendt*, University Park, PA, 1996; Mario Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, 2nd edn, Paris, 2013; *Confronting Tyranny: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, eds T. Koivukoski and D. E. Tabachnick, Lanham, MD, 2005; *Tiranía: Aproximaciones a una figura del poder*, eds G. Cappelli and A. Gómez Ramos, Madrid, 2008; *Le tyran et sa postérité dans la littérature latine de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, eds L. Boulègue, H. Casanova-Robin, and C. Lévy, Paris, 2013; and W. R. Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*, Cambridge/New York, 2013. Finally, two volumes with a double focus are *Le philosophe, le roi, le tyran. Études sur les figures royale et tyrannique dans la pensée politique grecque et sa postérité*, eds S. Gastaldi and J.-F. Pradeau, Sankt Augustin, 2009; and *The Splendors and Miseries of Ruling Alone: Encounters with Monarchy from Archaic Greece to the Hellenistic Mediterranean*, ed. N. Luraghi, Stuttgart, 2013.

of as covert control or open political violence. Furthermore, the types of crimes that constitute it can be seen as committed against the individual, society, or the cosmic order at large. And while its pernicious effects have been routinely execrated, tyrannical rule has on occasion also been justified as political necessity or even providential punishment. Precisely because of these many variables, we believe that there is value in a comparative study of the *longue durée*. But first a word on terminology is in order.

Naturally, the vocabulary used in discussions of bad rule—which in this volume span more than two thousand years and range from the Near East to England—has varied with time and place. Most important, ‘tyranny’ did not always exist as a category; when it did, it was frequently identical with bad governance, but sometimes an aggravated version thereof, while in other systems there could be ‘tyranny’ without bad governance. Similar issues pertain to the definition of the ‘tyrant’. Likewise, political theorists often use the word ‘prince’ to include any single ruler, yet in certain contexts a ‘prince’ must be distinguished from, say, a ‘king’, while in others a single ruler can be a ‘tyrant’ precisely because he is not also a ‘prince’. The essays in this volume discuss the legal or conceptual force of the relevant vocabularies in their specific historical contexts. Yet these differences should not obscure the fact that the discursive value of terms such as ‘tyrant’, ‘bad king’, ‘evil lord’, and so on is often the same. It is, indeed, this continuity—though blurred and imperfect—that makes a comparative study worthwhile, as it provides the foil against which the other variables gain relief. Starting from these premises, the book is intended to advance our knowledge on three levels.

First, the individual chapters present a collection of case studies that illuminate ancient, medieval, and Renaissance conceptions and representations of bad or tyrannical rule. Some contributors (Haldon and Panou, Rychterová, Schadee, Shimahara) analyze textual materials hitherto understudied or hard to access in English. Others (Baraz, Grillo, Luraghi, Nederman, Pedullà, Reimitz, Winterling) approach well-known sources with new perspectives or hermeneutic strategies. A common pursuit of all authors is to identify the particularities of the historical moments they examine, while also relating these to broader themes.

Second, and following from this, the study of bad rule opens a window onto at least two sets of factors influencing politics and political thought. Theoretically speaking, it is an exploration of the idea of ‘badness’, an anti-value that elucidates and, as noted, sometimes generates, the complementary ‘good values’.⁴ Since bad

⁴ See, in this respect, *Kakos: Badness and Anti-value in Classical Antiquity*, eds I. Sluiter and R. M. Rosen, Leiden/Boston, 2008.

rule is always a perversion of the norm, changes in its conceptualization demonstrate the shifting notions of what constitutes legitimate or acceptable human, social, and political behavior. The discourse of bad rule must therefore be seen in its relationship to ethical and metaphysical principles that contributed to the understanding of politics, as well as to broad concepts such as state and individual, liberty and happiness, human and divine justice. In practical terms, exploration of this discourse also brings to the fore the constituent elements and aspirations of actual political exchange: its authors and audiences, its means, and, especially, its ends. These factors are themselves culturally specific, and so embed the analysis in socio-political as well as intellectual history. Thus, by tracing conceptions of bad rule in eleven case studies, we uncover the ideological structures and societal patterns of the cultures in which they took shape.

Third, the chronological and geographical span of the volume creates a narrative of the 'western tradition' pertaining to bad rule from its ancient roots to its radical revision at the brink of modernity. The book addresses Hebrew and Greco-Roman foundations, transformations in the postclassical West and in Byzantium, vernacular translations, and finally revival and then rejection of the ancient heritage over the course of the Renaissance. These spatial and temporal frameworks are chosen because of their inherent cohesion, which will become apparent to the reader, but is not thereby self-explanatory. The scope of the volume therefore demands articulation both of the features of a 'Western tradition' on tyranny—or, indeed, of a category meaningfully called 'the West'—and of the periodization 'premodern'.

Our area of interest in this book is defined not so much by a shared political destiny or cultural identity as by the dynamic exchange of ideas. Indeed, while conceptions of bad rule derive from shared roots, the vitality of the tradition results precisely from the different political and intellectual contexts in which these seeds branched out, bore fruit and cross-fertilized. Underlying this interdependent plurality, we believe two contradictory motives driving the discourse of tyranny can be discerned. On the one hand, there is a long-standing and fundamental unease with monarchs, generated by their arbitrary, unchecked, and as it were extrainstitutional power. From this point of view, all monarchs are bad rulers. This perspective arises, independently, in the Hebrew Bible and in Greek and Roman thought, with the Greek perception also influencing the later Hellenizing sections of the Old Testament. After antiquity, its fortunes declined, but its influence never disappeared completely. On the other hand, there was an almost constant imperative—practical as well as intellectual—to accommodate monarchical supremacy. The concept of sacral monarchy, an ancient Near Eastern model also preserved in the Hebrew Bible, and furthermore expounded in Hellenistic philosophy of monarchy, played an important role in this respect, providing both Catholic and Orthodox Christianity with

their typical dualistic frameworks.⁵ In this construction, the earthly sovereign ruled by divine right and was the mirror, as well as the minister, of the heavenly lord: a mediator between human beings and the supreme and eternal king of the cosmos. In this providential harmony, the existence of anything but good rulers needed to be explained. Consequently, bad kings—undeniably common occurrences—were reinterpreted as either a punishment from God, or led astray by bad counselors, or not kings at all but tyrants, and thus deprived of legitimacy and divine support. Indeed, it is in this guise of tyrant that one recognizes the longevity of the bad king of the anti-monarchical tradition, who regained his independent existence with the Italian Renaissance.

Diametrically opposed though these perspectives are, a connective thread of both the pro- and the anti-monarchical tradition lies in the criteria employed for assessing bad rule. By and large, these derive from virtue ethics in their Greek, Roman, and Christian incarnations.⁶ In virtue ethics, the source of moral behavior, as well as the basis for moral judgment, is the character of the individual—in other words, the sum of intrinsic traits, or settled dispositions, that define his or her personal identity and social interactions.⁷ From the very start, Western virtue ethics and political philosophy were intimately intertwined. Aristotle's foundational *Nicomachean Ethics* develops the theory of virtue strictly within the parameters of civic life, since virtuous character—and, therefore, happiness—can only be achieved by citizens within the context of the city state. His equally seminal *Politics* treats virtue as a criterion for distinguishing good and bad regimes, and for determining both the optimal constitution and the distribution of political offices in the city.⁸ The elevation of princely virtue as a requirement for the happiness and welfare of the political community at large reflects the Hellenistic advocacy of monarchy within this

⁵ See J. Hani, *Sacred Royalty: From the Pharaoh to the Most Christian King*, transl. G. Polit, London, 2011; and *La royauté sacrée dans le monde chrétien*, eds A. Boureau and C. S. Ingerflom, Paris, 1992. For the early modern theory of divine-right kingship, rooted in medieval ideas on the divine provenance and sacred aura of royal authority, see J. N. Figgis classic *The Divine Rights of Kings*, 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1914; and, more recently, M.-F. Renoux-Zagamé, *Du droit de dieu au droit de l'homme*, Paris, 2003, esp. pp. 246–316.

⁶ Cf. R. Balot, *Greek Political Thought*, Malden, MA, 2008, p. 12: 'There is ample scope to speak of "virtue politics" in the ancient world, by analogy with the virtue ethics for which ancient philosophy has become well known. The virtues and vices therefore played a larger and more consistent role . . . than they could in modern political discourse.' See also, in this respect, J. R. Fears, 'The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.17.2, 1981, pp. 827–948; and *Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages, 1200–1500*, eds I. P. Becjzy and C. J. Nederman, Turnhout, 2007.

⁷ For a survey of premodern and modern theories of virtue ethics, see, most recently, *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. D. Russell, Cambridge/New York, 2013.

⁸ See A. MacIntyre's discussion of Aristotle's account of the virtues in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edn, Notre Dame, 2007, pp. 146–64; and W. R. Newell, 'Superlative Virtue: The Problem of Monarchy in Aristotle's *Politics*', *Western Political Quarterly*, 40:1, 1987, pp. 159–78.

general Aristotelian framework.⁹ Consequently, from antiquity to the Renaissance, the legitimacy and effectiveness of monarchical rule were viewed as in large measure dependent on the moral rectitude of the ruler—a quality that, moreover, was seen as instrumental in securing the love, respect, and loyalty of his subjects. Conversely, the sovereign's failure to cement his life and governance on the exercise of virtue and eradication of vice could only result in conduct antithetical to the common good, and consequently in compromised legitimacy.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, other paradigms of political theory—reason of state as well as a new absolutism—while by no means constituting a complete break with the past, nonetheless complicated or rejected reliance on virtue as the foundational principle of government.¹⁰ In brief, the former current of thought—traditionally associated with Machiavelli—excused certain vices as pragmatically necessary for governance. The latter allowed the argument—archetypically advanced by Thomas Hobbes—that virtue and vices alike were superseded by the greater good of unchallengeable sovereignty. From both perspectives, the demise of the Aristotelian understanding of political morality marks the end of the bad ruler as a personally flawed, indeed evil, lord. We have taken this shift—in terms of political philosophy, at least—to be the boundary between premodern and modern; it thereby also marks the terminus of the volume at hand.

The starting point for an enterprise of this sort is inevitably the ancient Greek world, where both the discourse of tyranny and Western political thought as a discipline originate. The volume therefore begins with Nino Luraghi's systematic discussion of the essential attributes of the tyrant in ancient Greece, whence both the term and the concept spread throughout the West. Seen against the background of Greek cultural and moral values, the tyrant emerges as a radically marginal character, a violator of the accepted norms of sociability, a monstrous aberration. Thus, tyranny

⁹ See, for instance, T. Adam, *Clementia Principis. Der Einfluss hellenistischer Fürstenspiegel auf den Versuch einer rechtlichen Fundierung des Principats durch Seneca*, Stuttgart, 1970. For an overview of the theory and practice of Hellenistic monarchy, see F. W. Walbank, 'Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas', in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 7.1: *The Hellenistic World*, eds idem, A. E. Astin, M. W. Frederiksen, and R. M. Ogilvie, 2nd edn, Cambridge/New York, 1984, pp. 62–100.

¹⁰ For reason of state, see M. Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250–1600*, Cambridge/New York, 1992; R. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651*, Cambridge/New York, 1993; and *Raison et déraison d'État. Théoriciens et théories de la raison d'État aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, ed. Y.-C. Zarka, Paris, 1994. On early modern absolutism, see *Absolutism in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. J. Miller, New York, 1990; but cf. the revisionist approaches in N. Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy*, London, 1992; *Der Absolutismus—ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West- und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550–1700)*, eds R. G. Asch and H. Duchhardt, Cologne, 1996; and in *Absolutismus, ein unersetzliches Forschungskonzept? Eine deutsch-französische Bilanz / L'absolutisme, un concept irremplaçable? Une mise au point franco-allemande*, ed. L. Schilling, Munich, 2008.

was perceived and depicted not as a bad political alternative but as a primordial sort of evil: a taboo that cannot be rationalized. Yet, the discourse of tyranny, Luraghi argues, underpinned the whole concept of monarchy in Greek culture, to the point that the typical virtues of the ideal ruler were nothing more than a reversal of the negative traits of the tyrant.

From Greek thought, we move to a second foundational corpus, as Jennie Grillo explores the—not unrelated—question of what it means to be a bad king in the Hebrew Bible. Her answer focuses on a particular type of marginality, to wit foreignness in various forms. Exotic otherness is shown to have served as a basic negative trait already in the central strata of the biblical corpus, while originally Greek conceptions of oriental despotism influenced the depiction of bad kingship in post-exilic texts. By contrast, in textual layers of a still later date, all earthly kingship is dismissed as evil: as Grillo observes, a long history of disappointment with bad Jewish kings led to the biblical proclamation of Yahweh as the only lord fit to rule over Israel.

Yelena Baraz then examines the anti-monarchical discourse that was indigenous to Rome since the expulsion of the kings. Through a study of the lexicographic range of the words *rex* (king) and *regnum* (kingship), she parses the accusations of ‘regal aspirations’ abounding in political writings of the late Republic. Although associated with the last Roman king, the ‘tyrannical’ Tarquin, these terms were not indicative of constitutional positions. Rather, in the rhetoric of faction politics, they suggest the traits of arrogance and rampant ambition. Thus refining our understanding of political discourse in the final years of the Republic, Baraz also paves the way for a new understanding of Julius Caesar’s dictatorship and its critical assessment before and after his assassination.

This same inherited stigma of kingship, as well as the legacy of noble faction, form the backdrop to Aloys Winterling’s chapter, which reinterprets the archetypical ‘tyrannical emperors’ Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. Winterling falsifies the psychological approach of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholarship and instead analyzes the emperors in the context of, on the one hand, the paradoxical sociopolitical conditions of early imperial Rome and, on the other, Rome’s traditional aristocratic ideals. In Winterling’s treatment, supposed insanity becomes a strategy for unmasking (Caligula), superseding (Nero), or breaking down (Domitian) the contradictions inherent in the imperial *res publica*. Provocatively, his reconstruction suggests that it is the traditional ‘good emperors’ who are in need of explication.

Entering the postclassical world, Helmut Reimitz examines what happened when Roman power structures were inhabited by so-called barbarian, ‘do-nothing’ kings. Focusing in particular on the multilayered depiction of Chilperic I (c. 539–589) in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, Reimitz shows that the Merovingian kings are

rebuked not only for barbarous and un-Christian behaviors but also, surprisingly, for being ‘too Roman.’ These critiques, he argues, originate with local political and ecclesiastical elites, who feared a destabilizing displacement of their own authority and jurisdiction as the Merovingians strove to centralize their state after the model of Rome. Once again, therefore, foreignness of various kinds becomes the marker of a bad king, this time reflecting the interplay between the complex sociopolitical developments of the sixth century and the Roman imperial tradition.

The following chapter shifts the focus to the Eastern empire, examining the evolution of perceptions of tyranny in Byzantium from the late Roman period to the eighth century. John Haldon and Nikos Panou show that these constitute the inverse of crucial concepts in Byzantine imperial ideology, particularly with regard to issues of religious orthodoxy, moral integrity, military efficiency, and administrative competence. Furthermore, they argue that the nature and scope of these perceptions can be better understood when examined in conjunction with the discourse of tyrannicide and usurpation as deployed in a broad spectrum of historical, hagiographic, and propagandistic works. The discussions commonly surrounding cases of legally precarious coups d’état offer insights into when, how, and why political actors came to be considered as tyrants in the first centuries of the Byzantine millennium.

Perceptions of tyranny are again the subject of Sumi Shimahara’s chapter, as she discusses the ways in which terms deriving from the root *tyran-* were employed in biblical commentaries and other sources of the Carolingian era. Shimahara shows that eighth- and ninth-century authors developed a distinct discourse on tyranny by blending pagan and patristic views with their own ethical-political principles. Carolingian conceptions of tyranny were grounded in considerations pertaining both to legality and to morality, with vice, eschatological concerns, and the association with the devil playing as important a role as issues of illegitimacy, usurpation, or malfeasance. These conceptions were moreover fairly elastic, as related terms not only had a wide connotative range but were also used to describe a variety of abusive behaviors of a royal, secular, or ecclesiastical origin.

Cary Nederman complements this with a study of the conceptual impossibility of the ‘bad king’ in the medieval Latin West—a conundrum that caused evil lords to be defined exclusively as tyrants. Nonetheless, political theorists from Isidore of Seville to John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas, and Dante display a remarkable ambivalence toward the tyrant’s role in civic life. While condemned in normative political theory, tyranny was often viewed as acceptable when a populace was deemed incapable of benefiting from good government, or—as Haldon and Panou show regarding Byzantium—it was legitimized as an instrument of divine punishment. Nederman demonstrates furthermore that even overtly tyrannical behavior could be

countenanced by attributing it not to the prince himself but to his evil counselors, who were subjected to much scrutiny in high and late medieval mirrors for princes.

The later Middle Ages saw a growing importance of the vernacular languages: their role in shaping the form, content, and audiences of late medieval political thought is the subject of Pavlína Rychterová's inquiry. Focusing on a famously wicked king of the late Middle Ages, Wenceslas IV (1361–1419), she traces the origins of his bad reputation to a group of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writings, which are often dismissed as fictions or studied solely as literature, but in fact represent new modes of articulating good and bad kingship. Rychterová shows that, in the context of an increasingly literate bourgeois culture, especially in university cities, these vernacular works transformed Latin theological approaches to monarchy, while rendering mirrors for princes and related literatures accessible to an unprecedented audience.

The following chapter returns to Latin discourse, as Hester Schadee seeks to define what fifteenth-century humanist treatments of tyranny have in common, and what distinguishes them from their classical and medieval counterparts. To this end, she confronts the numerous (self-)contradictions in the works of Poggio Bracciolini, educated in republican Florence, and Giovanni Pontano, employed in Naples by the royal dynasty. While their arguments range from the rejection of all rulers as tyrants to the education of the ideal prince, both authors depend on the same philosophical frameworks (Aristotle and the Stoa) and rhetorical form (epideictic oratory). Typical for the *Quattrocento*, these texts make no claim to universal validity, and Schadee argues that they should be read with due recognition of the conventions of literary genre, and humanism's culture of debate.

The volume concludes with an examination of Machiavelli as a theorist who enacted a willful and radical break with the past, yet endorsed most of his predecessors' tenets. Starting from Machiavelli's provocative omission of the term 'tyrant'—in favor of the euphemism 'new prince'—and his reassessment of 'tyrannical' behaviors as princely prudence, Gabriele Pedullà shows how these maneuvers earned the Florentine the execration of generations of commentators. They, however, misread him. Rather than denying the existence of pragmatically and morally evil lords, Pedullà argues, Machiavelli redraws the boundary between them and good rulers. Instrumental in this is the concept of glory, which reveals itself only in the fullness of time. In the present, Machiavelli implies, it is therefore impossible to distinguish with certainty a good prince from a tyrant.

These eleven chapters amply demonstrate that the execution of power was a constant source of anxiety from antiquity to the Renaissance. This is perhaps inevitable, since power is synonymous with inequality—be it in wealth, force, status, or other resources—and therefore carries with it the risk of oppression and the threat of violence. Evil lords were those rulers who capitalized on these differentials

to the detriment of their inferiors, or who obtained their advantages against the dispositions of an even greater power—whether law, ancestral custom, or divine will. Because of the enormity of these transgressions, evil lords were often marginal while being powerful: marked out as foreign, monstrous, irrational, or even devilish, they were in one or more ways inhuman. At the same time, they were part of the human condition, both in everyday experience—because power and its corruptions are ubiquitous—and in the structural sense of defining the ideals and limitations of the body politic.

Consequently, particular instantiations of evil lords illuminate their respective societies' ideologies and actual power structures—or, not uncommonly, the tension between these factors. This interplay determines, for instance, whether an evil lord is designated 'king' or cannot be a king, and whether tyrannical behavior marks an aristocrat in a monarchy or a barbarian in the post-Roman world. Additionally, the manifold sources that engage with evil lords—which vary in purpose, authorship, and audience—are testament to the different cultural elites who partook in and shaped political debate. Such elites were not always identical with those who held power, yet their discourse could serve to co-opt or even control—or at least to master and intellectually—the might of others. From the vantage point of history, it is of course they who are responsible for creating and codifying evil lords. Through their writings, then, a story of evil lords unfolds that is universal as well as extremely variegated: we hope that the following chapters provide the reader with rich and stimulating insights on both scores.

1

The Discourse of Tyranny and the Greek Roots of the Bad King

Nino Luraghi



LIKE MANY OF the words for our political concepts and institutions, ‘tyranny’ and ‘tyrant’ come from the Greek via Latin transliteration. As is the case with most Greek words whose derivations are in use in our own political language, this relationship can easily be misleading. In common parlance, if used in a political sense the word ‘tyrant’ indicates an oppressive ruler, typically an autocrat who exerts unrestrained power. The Greeks would have had no problem in recognizing their *turannos* in this definition. But very many of the rulers that a person of our times would call tyrants also occupied or occupy some sort of constitutionally defined position, even when their de facto power was (or is) unlimited—many of them even won elections and/or wore official titles, if often created ad personam. In reference to modern history, the word ‘tyrant’ usually conveys a negative judgment over a legitimate king. On the contrary, the *turannoi* who ruled several Greek poleis at different points in time from the seventh century BCE onward were leaders of autocratic regimes with no constitutional or legal foundations whatsoever that typically emerged from situations of civil strife within the polis. Such regimes were mostly unstable and always short-lived. The impact of the *turannoi* on the constitutional development of the Greek polis is agreed to have been nonexistent, and certainly tyranny never became an office integrated in the constitution of any Greek polis.¹

¹ The standard work of reference on Greek tyranny is H. Berve, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen*, 2 vols, Munich, 1967. For a shorter introduction in English, see now S. Lewis, *Greek Tyranny*, Bristol, 2009.

In their attempt at figuring out what kind of political regime Greek tyranny was and how it worked in practice, modern scholars have been less successful than one might have expected. The problems begin with the word itself: *turannos* was not a Greek word, its etymology and origin are controversial, and so is its original meaning.² It made its appearance in the Greek language during the archaic period, in the seventh century BCE, and it is in this period of Greek history, until the early fifth century BCE, that tyrants seem to be fairly common. They then become extremely rare during the fifth and fourth centuries only to reappear, in a somewhat less prominent way, during the late fourth and third. Accordingly, it is in the archaic period that scholars tend to attribute to tyranny an important historical function. When it comes to defining that function, however, views diverge almost diametrically. Points of controversy include the relationship between the tyrants and the nonaristocratic citizens, that is, the *demos*, and the extent to which archaic tyrants can be seen as popular leaders,³ or tyranny should on the contrary be seen as a natural development of the power struggles that appear to have been endemic within the elites of archaic Greece.⁴ Some scholars wish to grant tyranny a crucial role in the development of what we could call the political mentality of the Greeks of the archaic age, especially in the conceptualization of power and sovereignty as abstract notions,⁵ while the idea that the tyrants in a sense paved the way to more broadly representative forms of government by weakening the aristocracies that typically opposed them has often been put forward in research.⁶ In recent scholarship, finally,

² Most likely, the Greek word *turannos* derives from a word documented in Luwian hieroglyphic inscriptions from the Iron Age, *tarwanis*, an epithet of rulers and leaders that refers to their righteousness; see F. Pintore, 'Seren, tarwanis, tyrannos', in *Studi orientalistici in ricordo di Franco Pintore*, eds O. Carruba, M. Liverani, and C. Zaccagnini, Pavia, 1983, pp. 285–322, and A. Uchitel, 'The Earliest Tyrants: From Luwian *tarwanis* to Greek *τύραννος*', in *Greeks between East and West: Essays in Greek Literature and History in Memory of David Asheri*, eds G. Herman and I. Shatzman, Jerusalem, 2007, pp. 13–30.

³ As in M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie*, 5th edn, Tübingen, 1972, p. 784. This is an old-fashioned view nowadays, but see S. Mazzarino, *Fra Oriente e Occidente. Ricerche di storia greca arcaica*, 2nd edn, Milan, 1989, pp. 185–243, and the remarks of C. Mossé, *La tyrannie dans la Grèce antique*, Paris, 1969, pp. 87–8.

⁴ Tyranny as a genuinely aristocratic form of power: A. Heuß, 'Die archaische Zeit Griechenlands als geschichtliche Epoche', *Antike und Abendland*, 2, 1946, pp. 26–62. This view is dominant in German scholarship after the Second World War; see especially M. Stahl, *Aristokraten und Tyrannen im archaischen Athen. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung, zur Sozialstruktur und zur Entstehung des Staates*, Stuttgart, 1987, and L. De Libero, *Die archaische Tyrannis*, Stuttgart, 1996. For a synopsis in English, see H. Stein-Hölkeskamp, 'The Tyrants', in *A Companion to Archaic Greece*, eds K. A. Raaflaub and H. van Wees, Chichester/Malden, MA, 2009, pp. 106–10.

⁵ This line of thought is pursued in particular by J. F. McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece*, Ithaca, 1993, and by C. de Oliveira Gomes, *La cité tyrannique. Histoire politique de la Grèce archaïque*, Rennes, 2007.

⁶ For an early formulation, see Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 785.

the very meaningfulness of the concept has been called into question, and one finds calls to abolish chapters on tyranny from books on archaic Greece.⁷

Atypically for the history of preclassical Greece, lack of evidence can hardly be blamed for this interpretive uncertainty. On the contrary, there is scarcely any other aspect of archaic Greek history that our sources talk about as much as they talk about tyrants, so much so that Anthony Andrewes, in his famous 1956 book, could use tyranny as a red thread to write what is basically a history of archaic Greece.⁸ However, the evidence on tyranny found in the ancient sources is problematic for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the vast majority of the ancient texts that talk about the archaic period, which, as noted above, appears to have been the golden age of the tyrants, are retrospective and were actually written centuries later, in the best cases on the basis of local oral traditions but clearly with a significant dose of creativity. In other words, their factual reliability is highly questionable. Contemporary evidence comes only in the form of very brief allusions in fragments of lyric poetry that refer more often to tyranny in general terms than to specific cases. Second and connected, the narratives found in later sources, dating from the second half of the fifth century onward, show a marked preference for more anecdotal aspects over strictly political ones. We tend to hear a lot about the personal vices of the tyrant, his sexual life, his relationship to his family, and such like, but very little about how he seized power, let alone how he actually ruled his city.

If on the one hand the nature of the evidence creates very serious obstacles to the reconstruction of a political history of Greek tyranny that would satisfy the standards of modern historical research, on the other hand it opens up avenues of interpretation in a different field, that of the political imagination of the Greeks. For, indeed, it is very easy to realize that the stylized image of the tyrant conveyed by the sources is consistent and meaningful. Its peculiar aspects derive essentially from the fact that the Greeks could not regard sole rulership of any kind as a viable political option, but only as a degeneration of some sort—a political *monstrum*. They could project monarchy in the distant and murky past of the heroes or regard it as a typical aspect of the non-Greeks, the people they called *barbaroi*, but they could not envision it as a real and acceptable way to organize political power in a polis.⁹ Utopian constructs such as Plato's philosopher-kings and Aristotle's *pambasileia*, which not even their authors considered implementable,¹⁰ should not distract us

⁷ See G. Anderson, 'Before *tyrannoi* Were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History', *Classical Antiquity*, 24, 2005, pp. 173–222.

⁸ A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants*, London, 1956.

⁹ The discussion of forms of monarchy in Aristotle, *Politics* 3.1284b37–1285b29, is exemplary of this.

¹⁰ See P. Carlier, 'La notion de *pambasileia* dans la pensée d'Aristote', in *Aristote et Athènes*, ed. M. Piérart, Paris, 1993, pp. 103–18.

from this fundamental point. This means, among other things, that if we want to understand what the Greeks thought about monarchy, we need to start by deciphering the image of the tyrant.

As a starting point, rather than choosing from the repertoire of tyrant anecdotes, we may turn to a text that offers a synopsis of sorts of the themes that were typically associated with tyranny by the Greeks. In the third book of his *Histories*, Herodotus reports a debate that allegedly took place around 522 BCE, after a group of Persian noblemen led by Darius overturned an usurper by the name of Gaumatas, who had seized the Achaemenid throne after the death of King Cambyses, pretending to be the brother of the deceased king. After killing Gaumatas, the conspirators, in Herodotus' narrative, sit around a table to deliberate on the best constitutional form for the Persian Empire. The alternatives they consider are monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. This is the familiar typology of political orders that we find many times in Greek political philosophy.¹¹ Even though it is represented as a debate among Persians, and Herodotus goes to some length to support its plausibility, it cannot be denied that this debate reflects Greek political ideas through and through. Such is clearly the case with the negative depiction of monarchic rule offered by the Persian Otanes, the proponent of democracy (Herodotus 3.80). According to Otanes, rule by an individual is inevitably associated with hubris, that is, with that kind of offense that puts the victim in front of a stark alternative between retaliating, with all the dangers involved, and admitting social inferiority, thereby losing status.¹² The Persians, says Otanes, alluding to their last two rulers, are aware from personal experience of the fact that monarchy and hubris are inseparable, and general considerations lead to the same conclusion. The unrestrained power of the monarch would drive even the best of men to megalomania. Equipped with the envy that is rooted in every man and the potential for hubris that derives from his power, the monarch possesses the most complete and perfect wickedness. And yet, Otanes continues, if any man should be free from envy it is the tyrant, since he has everything. Instead, however, he envies the best citizens and is happy to listen to the accusations against them brought by the inferior sort. He is a living paradox, equally incapable of dealing with flattery and with honesty. And, what is even worse, he is

¹¹ On this famous constitutional debate, see D. Lanza, *Il tiranno e il suo pubblico*, Turin, 1977, pp. 225–32 (on the historical and political aspects), and C. Pelling, 'Speech and Action: Herodotus' Debate on the Constitutions', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 48, 2002, pp. 123–58 (literary). For a comprehensive discussion of the emergence of this threefold typology in fifth-century political thought, see J. Bleicken, 'Zur Entstehung der Verfassungstypologie im 5. Jahrhundert v.Chr. (Monarchie, Aristokratie, Demokratie)', *Historia*, 28, 1979, pp. 148–72.

¹² On the meaning of hubris, often misunderstood in modern parlance, see N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster, 1992.

a subverter of traditional social norms, who rapes women and kills men without a trial. Without exaggeration, we can say that Otañes depicts monarchy not so much as a form of rule but as a psychological syndrome.¹³

The view of tyranny that we find in this speech is far from untypical: it actually recurs in very similar terms in texts from which we would expect a much more factual and sober approach. Aristotle's definition of tyranny is underpinned by the same themes and ideas that appear in Otañes' speech. In *Politics* (4.1295a1–24), where he calls the tyrant a subtype of the general category monarch, Aristotle defines tyranny as the unaccountable rule of an individual over citizens who are his equals or superiors. Such rule is exerted in the interest of the ruler and not in the interest of the ruled. Correspondingly, the tyrant rules against the will of his subjects. This all sounds very rational and political, until we pause to consider what it is precisely that identifies the tyrant according to Aristotle's definition: his inferiority with respect to some of the other citizens, and his lack of superiority with respect to the rest. This of course is a purely moral judgment. If we return to Herodotus, we see immediately that the question of moral superiority and inferiority is present there, as well, and again we meet moral concepts or, rather, political concepts phrased in moral terms, such as 'the best citizens'. On the other hand, Aristotle is just as little inclined as Herodotus to discuss the specifics of tyranny as a form of rule. Actually, he appears to think that there is not a lot to say about it anyway.

Plato's description of the rise of the tyrant in Book VIII of the *Republic* at first sight seems to offer a more convincing explanation of how this regime came about. The basic fault line opposes the wealthy and the poor. When the latter are empowered by a democratic constitution, they start tormenting the wealthy in order to despoil them. The wealthy then turn increasingly oligarchic, threatening the poor and compelling them to choose a leader to protect their interests. Such leader is the tyrant. But apart from the fact that what Plato presents as an inherent dynamic of human communities is in fact an extremely tendentious view of social relationships, the portrait of the tyrant as a werewolf, who tastes human blood and cannot live without it thereafter, unmasks the presence of the same sort of symbols and associations.¹⁴

¹³ In his speech, Otañes calls the ruler either *monarchos* or *turannos*. The former word will later acquire a purely descriptive meaning, becoming a general term indicating 'rule by one single individual', of which tyranny is a perverted form (e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1160a33ff), but at this point in time it is still to be understood as a synonym of *turannos*, as shown by C. Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe. Per un'archeologia del potere nella Grecia antica*, Milan, 1996, p. 211 with further references.

¹⁴ *Rep.* 8.564–5. For the tyrant as a werewolf, see *Rep.* 8.565d. For the equivalence between tyrants and predators, see also Plat. *Phaed.* 82a; according to *Rep.* 9.619b, the tyrant is condemned to devour his children (see below on tyranny and cannibalism). On the image of the tyrant in Plato, especially in this passage of the *Republic*, see Lanza, *Il tiranno e il suo pubblico*, pp. 63–9.

Tellingly, the potential tyrant is not just any citizen: he comes from the class of what Plato calls the drones, profligate men who are ruled by their appetites and need to acquire wealth in unjust ways to satisfy them. Again, tyranny is first and foremost a problem of personal psychology.

If we extend our observations to other texts, what takes shape is a set of recognizable themes that are recurrently associated with the tyrant, and by extension with any kind of sole ruler, by Greek authors across the borders of time and genres, from archaic lyric poetry to fifth-century tragedy and from historiography to political theory. The image is essentially consistent and points to a perception of the rule of the tyrant as a state of radical anomie, one in which the political community of the citizens loses its identity under the spell of a creature endowed with demonic faculties and motivated by inhuman appetites.¹⁵ The regularity of the Greek discourse of tyranny is striking, both in terms of what it includes and in terms of what it excludes. The more specifically political aspects of this regime are invariably seen, if at all, in terms of decadence or temporary loss of consciousness on the part of the political community. But the focus is uncompromisingly on the persona of the ruler, whose life story and political career unfold according to a fixed pattern.

At the beginning, the rise of the tyrant is often announced or accompanied by supernatural signs.¹⁶ The gods ambiguously signal the arrival of something extraordinary, and in some cases the very body of the tyrant is marked in ways that predict his destructive impact on the political community.¹⁷ The tyrant is usually a marginal character, from the point of view of the citizen body or of its ruling elite; he can be an unfit member of the elite, or a half-blood of some sort—but he is never a real stranger, that is, a nonmember of the community. He surrounds himself with outsiders of a more radical sort, most commonly foreigners who serve as mercenary soldiers or as bodyguards, or slaves to whom he gives freedom and whom he often puts in the place of their masters, marrying them to their wives.¹⁸ Within the citizen body, he seems to be completely isolated, and only very rarely and indirectly are we told that segments of the citizenry supported him. In any case, citizen support seems to occur only in conjunction with the tyrant's takeover, and to be virtually nonexistent once his power is established. The theme of the isolation is then confirmed at

¹⁵ See the remarks of O. Murray, 'Falaride tra mito e storia', in *L'incidenza dell'antico. Studi in memoria di Ettore Lepore*, ed. L. Breglia Pulci Doria, vol. 2, Naples, 1996, p. 167.

¹⁶ The evidence is presented and discussed in Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe*, pp. 34–114.

¹⁷ On this, see the landmark contribution of J.-P. Vernant, 'From Oedipus to Periander: Lameness, Tyranny, Incest in Legend and History', *Arethusa*, 15, 1982, pp. 26–33.

¹⁸ This theme is explored in D. Asheri, 'Tyrannie et mariage forcé. Essai d'histoire sociale grecque', *Annales (ESC)*, 32:1, 1977, pp. 21–48.

the end of the story, as it were, in the way the death of the tyrant is often depicted: a sort of collective ritualized murder, to which the entire citizen body takes part.

Such a depiction of the establishment of tyranny raises obvious problems of plausibility. If the tyrant enjoyed no support within the citizen body, the fact that he could rule over it risks becoming inexplicable. This latent problem was addressed most effectively by one aspect of the persona of the tyrant, namely, cunning.¹⁹ Certain tyrants were supposedly so cunning that they were able to persuade the citizen body to grant them the very means by which they seized power: either large sums of money, intended for public construction projects, which the aspiring tyrants then used to recruit mercenaries,²⁰ or even directly an armed bodyguard. Such was the case with the tyrant of Athens Pisistratus, who allegedly convinced his fellow citizens to grant him a bodyguard by wounding himself and pretending to have been attacked by his enemies.²¹ Needless to say, the bodyguard was then instrumental to his rise to power. In other cases, tyrants were able to reduce the citizens to impotence with various expedients, ranging from shutting them out of the city walls exploiting the occasion provided by some religious procession, to depriving them of their weapons with all sorts of ruses.²² The fact that these stories made the citizens appear rather naive, to say the least, is only rarely noticed by the authors who tell the stories, but even then, rather surprisingly, it is not seen as undermining the plausibility of the stories themselves.²³

Beyond the crucial moment of their rise to power, cunning was an endemic characteristic of Greek tyrants. It often took the form of a penchant for practical jokes and could occasionally be depicted as wisdom.²⁴ The image of the wise tyrant, not

¹⁹ On the logical function of the tyrant's cunning, see B. M. Lavelle, *The Sorrow and the Pity: A Prolegomenon to a History of Athens under the Peisistratids, c. 560–510 B.C.*, Stuttgart, 1993, p. 115.

²⁰ As in the cases of Phalaris and Theron, both tyrants of Agragas in the second quarter of the sixth and in the early fifth century, respectively (see Polyaeus 5.1.1 and 6.51).

²¹ The story appears first in Herodotus, 1.59.5, and is repeated with additional details by later sources, including the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens* 14.1 and Plutarch's *Life of Solon* 30.2.

²² Examples include Pisistratus of Athens (*Constitution of Athens* 15.4, Polyaeus 1.21.2), Aristodemus of Cumae (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 7.8.2), Phalaris of Agrigentum (Polyaeus 5.1.2), Archinus of Argos (Polyaeus 3.8); see also Hippias in Thucydides 6.58.1.

²³ The most striking example is that of Pisistratus' stratagem, called 'very silly' by Herodotus, of dressing up a tall woman as Athena and parading her through the streets of Athens (Herodotus 1.60.3–5); for a rationalization of the story, see W. R. Connor, 'Tribes, Festivals and Processions: Civic Ceremonial and Political Manipulation in Archaic Greece', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 107, 1987, pp. 42–7.

²⁴ For a memorable example of the former, see Herodotus 3.56.2: the tyrant of Samos Polycrates convinces the Spartans to lift the siege of his city by giving them lead coins coated in gold (for the punchline of the story to come across, it is necessary to know that the Spartans did not mint coins themselves and accordingly, while having a reputation for greed, were not very familiar with minted coins). On the motif of the wisdom of the tyrant and its inherent ambiguity, see Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe*, pp. 193–6, and C. Yerly, 'Figures du tyran archaïque: entre le monstre et le sage', *Études de lettres*, 231:2, 1992, pp. 13–20.

very frequent but still clearly attested in ancient literature, is one of the signs that point to a fundamental ambiguity in the attitude of Greeks toward sole rule that will need to be addressed later. The irresistible cunning of the Greek tyrant makes him in some respects similar to a character that is familiar to folklorists, the trickster. First identified and defined by the American anthropologist Paul Radin in the story-telling tradition of northwestern Native American tribes, the trickster is represented in the traditional stories of many cultures and has been investigated extensively. As is occasionally the case with the tyrant, the trickster is often characterized by physical deformity. He shares with the tyrant the taste for violating fundamental behavioral norms, especially as regards food and sex. Even though his monstrosity tends to be ridiculous rather than tragic, the trickster, like the tyrant, is a creature of dubious humanity.²⁵

The violation of the accepted norms of sociability is a veritable trademark of the Greek tyrant. Gender and kinship relations bring this most clearly to the fore. The Persian Otanes, in the speech we have just considered, alluded to the sexual incontinence of the tyrant, and various tyrant stories provide details and case studies.²⁶ The checklist includes rape and necrophilia, and even incest is present, if in an allusive way. The family relations of tyrants can take the shape of a true *Familienroman*, with tyrants killing their wives and alienating their sons, or, on the other hand, subjecting their wives to sexual practices against nature in order not to beget an offspring. Cannibalism is also clearly hinted at, and babies appear as the most plausible victims.²⁷ The deep symbolism of such stories is evident and chimes with that of the trickster-tyrant: the tyrant is a creature that belongs to the order of nature not of culture, a representative of primordial chaos. All in all, tyrant stories show that the Greeks easily took for granted the notion that a tyrant could violate the most fundamental norms and taboos of human and social life. Of course, the consequences of such violations regularly turned against the tyrants themselves, ultimately in the form of their losing their beloved ones and their power and being punished in savage

²⁵ Among the vast literature on the trickster, see especially the inaugural study of P. Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, New York, 1956. Various interesting essays, including one on Greek culture, are included in *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, eds W. J. Hynes and W. G. Doty, Tuscaloosa, 1993. S. Miceli, *Il demiurgo trasgressivo. Studio sul trickster*, Palermo, 1984, provides an excellent comprehensive study. Of particular interest for ancient historians is C. Grottanelli, 'Tricksters, Scapegoats, Champions, Saviors', *History of Religion*, 23, 1983–4, pp. 117–39. For an investigation of the trickster-tyrant, I may be allowed to refer the reader to N. Luraghi, 'The Cunning Tyrant: The Cultural Logic of a Narrative Pattern', in *Patterns of the Past: Epit̃deumata in the Greek Tradition*, eds A. Moreno and R. Thomas, Oxford/New York, 2014, pp. 67–92.

²⁶ Evidence for the dysfunctional sex and family life of the tyrant is presented by Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe*, pp. 142–89.

²⁷ See Murray, 'Falaride', pp. 171–2.

ways. In other words, the stories do not question the cultural norms and values infringed upon by the tyrants; rather, they reinforce their validity by pointing to the disastrous consequences of their violation. This is a rule that applies to the discourse of tyranny in general: much as it can be a means of exploring disorder, what it projects is a dystopia.

In a more general fashion, the same concept is also embedded in the topical unhappiness of the tyrant, which features most comprehensively in Xenophon's *Hiero*, an imaginary dialogue between the tyrant Hiero of Syracuse and the lyric poet Simonides in which Hiero explains to the poet, who pretends to think otherwise, that in spite of his unlimited power and superior wealth, the tyrant is actually unhappy—because nobody really likes him!²⁸ This rather paradoxical motif brings to the surface an ambiguity built into the discourse of tyranny. At first sight, it clashes with the fact that tyranny is generally described as highly coveted.²⁹ If one looks closely at the evidence, however, it turns out that the desire for tyranny is regularly attributed to somebody else: it is the mark of the wise man to recognize its fallacy.

A catalog of tyrannical vices should not fail to include cruelty, although this attribute is less prominent in the Greek discourse of tyranny than one might expect, and clearly less prominent than in later anti-monarchic discourses. In the case of Greek tyrants, cruelty tends to complete other characteristics and give them a tyrannical twist, rather than having a strong semantics of its own. The most infamous example is surely that of the tyrant Phalaris of Akragas, who used to roast alive his victims in a bronze bull equipped with a sophisticated mechanism that turned the wailings of the hapless into beautiful music for the entertainment of the tyrant.³⁰ Incidentally, it is more than a curiosity that the earliest surviving ancient text that mentions Phalaris' bull happens to be a victory song composed in 470 BCE by the poet Pindar for a tyrant, Hiero of Syracuse.³¹ It would be idle to speculate that, by bringing up Phalaris, Pindar might be criticizing implicitly the man who paid him.³²

²⁸ On this curious little work and its various aspects, see especially V. Gray, 'Xenophon's *Hiero* and the Meeting of the Wise Man and Tyrant in Greek Literature', *Classical Quarterly*, 36:1, 1986, pp. 115–23, and more recently H. Leppin, 'Xenophons *Hieron*: Überlegungen zur Geschichte des monarchischen Denkens im klassischen Athen', in *Zwischen Monarchie und Republik. Gesellschaftliche Stabilisierungsleistungen und politische Transformationspotentiale in den antiken Staaten*, eds B. Linke, M. Meier, and M. Strothmann, Stuttgart, 2010, pp. 77–89.

²⁹ As pointed out by W. R. Connor, 'Tyrannis Polis', in *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Else*, eds J. H. D'Arms and J. W. Eadie, Ann Arbor, 1977, pp. 98–9.

³⁰ On Phalaris' bull, see Murray, 'Falaride', pp. 169–70.

³¹ Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 1.92–9.

³² On this point, see especially C. Mann, 'Der Dichter und sein Auftraggeber. Die Epinikien Bakchylides' und Pindars als Träger von Ideologien', in *Bakchylides. 100 Jahre nach seiner Wiederentdeckung*, eds A. Bagordo and B. Zimmermann, Munich, 2000, pp. 29–46.

Clearly, the discourse of tyranny had such a currency that even a tyrant could find it expedient to make use of it, to distance himself from the negative elements attached to his social persona.³³ In a rather more prosaic fashion, the theme of the tyrant burning alive his opponents appears also in an inscription dating to the late fourth century BCE, confirming that what we are looking at is not a mere literary construct but a much more widespread representation.³⁴ It should also be pointed out that the tyrant's cruelty serves to satisfy his instincts, not to terrorize his opponents. No severed heads were hung in front of the tyrant's residence. This is an aspect that extends to the use of violence by the tyrant as a whole.

Violence is such an omnipresent aspect of the tyrant that it may easily be taken for granted by the modern interpreter as well. The arbitrary murder of fellow citizens is one of the key features in the checklist of tyrannical qualities that appears in the speech against monarchy of the Persian Otanes. The suppression of opponents is present in the stories of the vast majority of Greek tyrants, and very often such opponents are characterized as the morally best citizens, whose free spirit and strong nerves constitute a latent threat for the tyrant. Among the most memorable examples is that of Periander of Corinth, who received the advice to kill all the best citizens from his colleague, the tyrant Thrasybulus of Miletus, in the form of a visual message transmitted by an unwitting messenger: according to Herodotus, the tyrant of Miletus walked out of the city into the grain fields with the envoy of Periander, who had been told to ask him for advice on how to best rule Corinth, and kept asking the envoy to repeat the question, while at the same time lopping off the tallest and most beautiful among the ears of grain. Periander understood the cryptic message—the tyrants were also masters of secret communication—and eagerly implemented it.³⁵ Interestingly, however, as in the case of cruelty, the Greek tyrant does not seem to use violence as a language, as it were, installing a regime of terror to dissuade his enemies from conspiring against him. The absence of such an obvious component of the toolkit of the ideal autocrat, abundantly present in modern dictatorships, should give us pause. It may derive in part from the political culture of a face-to-face society, in which the immanence of the ruler reaches a degree that would be unthinkable in

³³ As argued by the present author in 'Hieron agonistes or the Masks of the Tyrant', in *Dicere laudes. Elogio, comunicazione, creazione del consenso*, ed. G. Urso, Pisa, 2011, pp. 41–2.

³⁴ The inscription is IG XII 2, 526, lines 11–13; see A. Ellis-Evans, 'The Tyrants Dossier of Eresos', *Chiron*, 42, 2012, pp. 183–212.

³⁵ The story appears in Herodotus 5.92 ζ-η.1, and in Aristotle, *Politics* 3.1284a26–37, where the roles are reversed and Periander is the adviser. On the political implications of the various versions of the story, see the fascinating essay of S. Forsdyke, 'From Aristocratic to Democratic Ideology and Back Again: The Thrasybulus Anecdote in Herodotus' *Histories* and Aristotle's *Politics*', *Classical Philology*, 94, 1999, pp. 361–72. On the motif of the tyrant and enigmatic communication, see Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe*, pp. 193–4, with further examples.

a modern state. In any case, the failure to use terror as an *instrumentum regni* is consistent with the general tendency of the discourse of tyranny to regard the tyrant as a psychological type, focusing on his vices, rather than analyzing tyranny as a kind of political regime, with its strengths and weaknesses.

In the inscription mentioned above, the tyrant is said to have burned down the city of Eresos on Lesbos and its temples, together with the citizens who had sought refuge there. It thereby brings up another dominant theme of the discourse of tyranny, namely, sacrilege. As it turns out, Greek tyrants seem to have had a strong preference for committing their crimes in sacred spaces, violating the right of asylum and thereby enhancing their offense to mortals with an additional offense to the immortals. The disarming of citizens during religious festivals has similar implications, if in a milder way. More specific and direct offenses to the gods, typically in the form of plundering sanctuaries or stealing sacred objects for their commercial value, were apparently a preferred activity of tyrants.³⁶ And yet, Greek gods, short-tempered as they tended to be, seem to have been surprisingly patient with tyrants: even though the ultimate bad end that Greek tyrants tend to come to is sometimes presented as a manifestation of divine retribution, direct and recognized divine intervention never plays a part in the demise of a tyrant. No Greek tyrant appears to have been struck by Zeus's lightning in the act of lifting precious offerings from a sanctuary or laying hands upon suppliants and dragging them away from altars and temples. It looks almost as though the violation of the cosmic order brought about by tyranny ran even deeper than an individualized offense to a specific god, so that only the whole trajectory of the tyrannical biography could function as an atonement for the monstrosity of the tyrant: the debt to the gods was normally paid at the end. This comes to the fore most clearly in narratives on the deaths of tyrants, who often end up as the victims of the very same ferine violence that they used to practice on others: torture, stoning, and the massacre of the whole family are recurrent themes associated with tyrannical deaths. The extermination of the family, often accompanied by the ritual expulsion of the bones of the ancestors of the tyrant, who were dug out and thrown across the borders of the polis, shows that tyrants were seen as ritually polluted and thereby as a potential cause of divine retribution for the people around them.³⁷

³⁶ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Oeconomicus* 2.42 and Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.84 include a collection of bons mots with which Dionysius the First of Syracuse accompanied the collection of precious offerings from sanctuaries; among the most memorable, the words with which he supposedly took away the golden robe that covered a statue of Zeus: it was too cold for the winter but too hot for the summer!

³⁷ The depiction of the deaths of tyrants and its logic is explored in N. Luraghi, 'Il carnevale macabro, ovvero, morire da tiranno', *Annali di archeologia e storia antica*, 4, 1997, pp. 53–68; see also Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe*, pp. 241–55.

The relationship of tyrants and gods has another aspect that requires our attention. In spite of the tyrants' penchant for sacrilege, the Greeks also thought that tyrants were responsible for some of the most spectacular projects of religious architecture of the archaic age—they may actually have retrospectively attributed to tyrants even temples with which the latter had little to do.³⁸ However, information on the tyrants as temple builders is never embedded within tyrant narratives—except in the form, mentioned above, of the would-be tyrant taking on the contract for building a temple and then using the money to hire mercenaries and seize power. Still, on a fundamental level, it is indeed remarkable that the Greeks do not seem to have perceived any inconsistency between the sacrilegious crimes of the tyrants and their pious construction projects they so clearly remembered. Aristotle, the only Greek author who discussed the phenomenon of the temple-building tyrant in a systematic way, explains that the purpose of such initiatives was to impoverish the citizens and keep them busy, to prevent them from plotting against the tyrant.³⁹ The logic of this argument is clearly faulty: in Greece, only slaves and the poorest among the citizens were directly involved in the construction of temples. The wealthier citizens, the traditional enemies of the tyrant, certainly did not spend any time working on the construction sites. What happens in this passage is that Aristotle clashes against one of the rules of the discourse of tyranny: tyrants are natural enemies of the gods, and accordingly, temples initiated by tyrants cannot be seen as an expression of their piety but have to be interpreted otherwise, namely, as one of their cunning tricks of which the fellow citizens are the victims.

Aristotle's remarks on the tyrants as builders of temples provide us with one of the most impressive examples of the overwhelming cultural plausibility of the discourse of tyranny. Not even a theoretical thinker like Aristotle was able to break loose from its rules. One such rule was the almost total silence on how tyranny worked in practice. The discourse of tyranny was entirely focused on the depiction of the tyrant as a human type, with very specific features, and left completely in the dark the question of tyranny as a political regime. But even the anthropology of the tyrant was developed only to the extent that was needed to convey the message it

³⁸ As may be the case with the famous and gigantic temple of Hera on Samos according to the chronology established by H. J. Kienast, 'Zur Baugeschichte der beiden Dipteroi im Heraion von Samos', in *Les grands ateliers d'architecture dans le monde égéen du VII^e siècle avant J.-C.*, eds J. des Courtils and J.-C. Moretti, Istanbul, 1993, pp. 69–75. The topic of the tyrant as temple builder has so far not been investigated globally; for the case of Athens, see most recently J. Boersma, 'Peisistratos' Building Activity Reconsidered', in *Peisistratos and the Tyranny: A Reappraisal of the Evidence*, ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Amsterdam, 2000, pp. 49–56; for Sicily, T. Van Compernelle, *L'influence de la politique des Deinoménides et des Emménides sur l'architecture et l'urbanisme sicéliotes*, Leuven, 1992.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 5.1313b18–28.

was supposed to convey. Until the fourth century, it seems to have been unimportant to determine precisely whether it was monarchic power that by itself awakened tyrannical passions in potentially any man, as Herodotus implies, or whether the potential tyrant needed to possess the necessary vices before reaching for power. As soon as the attempt to depict a positive image of the monarch was undertaken by the likes of Xenophon and Isocrates, it became clearer that if the tyrannical syndrome was regarded as an inevitable consequence of monarchy, there could be no good monarchs at all.⁴⁰ Drawing such a consequence was not problematic for the political imagination of the Greeks, as shown once again by the sober Aristotle. In the third book of the *Politics*, Aristotle concludes a discussion on whether it be preferable for the best laws or for the best ruler to be supreme by stating that, in his opinion, those who recommend the first option want god and reason to rule while those who recommend the second add to this perfect couple of ruling entities a wild beast.⁴¹

On the whole, at any rate, the question whether one is born a tyrant or becomes one under the influence of unlimited power, which may seem to us of central importance, did not receive the attention one would have expected. It is not too difficult to see why. The notion that it was power itself that corrupted the tyrant, if explored in a systematic way, could open a dangerous breach in the texture of the discourse. If the would-be tyrant was not inherently wicked, his rise to power could be explained otherwise than by postulating that he had deceived his fellow citizens: it could be explained by his personal merits, for instance, and this in turn posed the problem of whether a political community could decide for its own good to be ruled by a sole ruler—obviously a very dangerous notion, which is often seen lurking below the surface of the discourse. Such observations incidentally confirm that in essence, the discourse of tyranny was indeed political and not anthropological: that is, that it really talked about a community and its rules, not about an individual and his character.⁴² That it did so with the language of personal vices and appetites rather than with that of political practice and institutions is a part of its internal logic, irrational as it may seem.

As pointed out above, seen against the background of Greek cultural values and norms, the meaning of the attributes of the tyrant is consistent and clear. The tyrant is in every sense a marginal character from the point of view of the community of the

⁴⁰ On this early phase of Greek thought on monarchy, see L. Bertelli, 'Peri basileias: i trattati sulla regalità dal IV secolo a.C. agli apocrifi pitagorici', in *Il dio mortale. Teologie politiche tra antico e contemporaneo*, eds P. Bettio and G. Filoramo, Brescia, 2002, pp. 17–28.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Politics* 3.1287a29–30.

⁴² For this important point, see P. Schmitt-Pantel, 'Histoire de tyran, ou comment la cité grecque construit ses marges', in *Les marginaux et les exclus dans l'histoire*, Paris, 1979, p. 228.

citizens, a man indifferent to the key values of the community, who violates all the rules of the good man and of the good citizen according to the Greeks.⁴³ Tellingly, only a minority among the traits of the tyrant possess a true political relevance. Ultimately, tyranny is perceived and depicted not as a bad political alternative but as a much more primordial sort of evil, a reversion from culture to nature, a world turned upside down in cultural and religious terms. Tyranny is taboo and cannot be rationalized. Considering these premises, we cannot really expect to find in the sources a direct and consistent explanation of archaic tyranny as a kind of political order or an analysis of its functioning. The rules of the discourse of tyranny make it possible to see it only in primordial terms. Recognizing explicitly the roots of tyranny inside the political community would involve entertaining the possibility that such a radical form of evil be in some sense the consequence of widespread values and patterns of behavior, a rather undesirable conclusion.

On close inspection, it becomes clear that the rules of the discourse of tyranny underpinned the whole concept of monarchy in Greek culture, or, put in different terms, that the discourse of tyranny apparently was the only language the Greeks had to talk about monarchy. In the fourth century, when various writers began to envision a positive image of the ideal monarch, all they could do was to reverse the negative traits of the tyrant and create a positive mirror image, with the result that Greek monarchic ideology is largely dependent on the discourse of tyranny: for all intents and purposes, the good king needed to possess all the virtues that corresponded to the vices of the tyrant, and usually only those. Otherwise, he was a tyrant, not a king.⁴⁴ Not even Plato or Aristotle offer a convincing discussion of monarchy as a kind of constitution that can be seen as legitimate per se, without the ruler being a mixture of hero and Stoic sage or the ruled being slavish barbarians. Even in the Hellenistic period, in a world dominated by powerful kings, the ideology of monarchy still concentrates almost exclusively on the personality of the ruler, and the need to pre-empt the accusation of tyranny remains very strong. How exactly monarchy was supposed to function as a political institution and as the core of a political

⁴³ These themes are explored in Schmitt-Pantel, 'Histoire de tyran', pp. 217–31, taking Herodotus' passages on Periander of Corinth as a case study (which somewhat narrows down her perspective, making it look as though the discourse of tyranny had been a product of fifth-century Athenian democratic ideology rather than a more widespread component of the Greek political imagination).

⁴⁴ The way that Greek ideas about monarchy derived from the discourse of tyranny seems to have been easier to notice for Orientalists, and this is certainly not a coincidence; see Pintore, 'Seren, tarwanis, tyrannos', pp. 319–21, and, from a Greek point of view, M. Haake, 'Writing Down the King: The Communicative Function of Treatises *On Kingship* in the Hellenistic Period', in *The Splendors and Miseries of Ruling Alone: Encounters with Monarchy from Archaic Greece to the Hellenistic Mediterranean*, ed. N. Luraghi, Stuttgart, 2013, p. 176.

system remained largely undiscussed, even in works that professed to be devoted to precisely this topic.⁴⁵

The extent to which such a complex of notions and representations was culturally determined can be grasped very easily by way of a comparison. In the Near East, where monarchy was above all a traditional form of rule, such traces of anti-monarchic discourse as can be found look completely different. The focus is on the lack of legitimacy of one specific ruler, typically represented by a negative relationship to the gods, without the legitimacy of kingship as such ever being called into question. The bad king of the Near Eastern tradition allows temples to go to ruin, and under his rule the land bears no fruits and the gods make their disappointment visible through natural phenomena. This bad king is a religious problem, not a political one, as one would expect in a context in which the primary legitimacy of monarchy derives from the gods.⁴⁶

The influence of the Greek discourse of tyranny is, however, cross-cultural. It stretches far beyond the borders of Hellenism to reach at first the Roman Empire,⁴⁷ and then coming up all the way to the early modern period. To the ruling elite of the Roman Empire, and even to the emperors themselves, the discourse of tyranny offered an effective and familiar set of tropes that could be used retrospectively to talk about certain of their rulers, or of their predecessors in the case of emperors, without questioning the monarchic form of rule as such. Clear traces of the discourse of tyranny can be recognized in the biographies of the most infamous of the Julio-Claudians, characters like Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero, and in those of many of their successors from Domitian onward.⁴⁸ Themes like cruelty, cunning, or sexual perversion offer the most obvious examples, and one could also mention in this connection John Scheid's study on the deaths of tyrant-emperors, which abound in themes that come straight from the Greek discourse of tyranny.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ This point is brought out very clearly by Bertelli, 'Peri basileias', pp. 28–43, and by Haake, 'Writing Down the King', pp. 165–206.

⁴⁶ On the ideology of Near Eastern monarchy, see H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*, 2nd edn, Chicago, 1978.

⁴⁷ For an impressive example of the resilience of the discourse of tyranny, see N. Kennell, 'Herodes Atticus and the Rhetoric of Tyranny', *Classical Philology*, 92, 1997, pp. 346–62.

⁴⁸ See the chapter by Aloys Winterling in this volume.

⁴⁹ See J. Scheid, 'La mort du tyran. Chronique de quelques morts programmées', in *Du châtement dans la cité. Supplices corporels et peine de mort dans le monde antique*, Rome, 1984, pp. 177–90. Interestingly, there is one very diagnostic vice that distinguishes bad emperors from Greek tyrants, and that is laziness; of course, laziness can be seen as a vice in a monarch only in the framework of a political discourse that does accept monarchy, unlike the discourse of tyranny. On this, see M. L. Dészpa, 'Idleness. Monarchic and Antimonarchic Discourses and the Construction of Roman Imperial Order', in *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, ed. H. Börm, Stuttgart, 2015, pp. 235–47.

Usually mediated by Roman authors, the influence of the Greek discourse of tyranny survived through medieval political thought, experiencing a revival after the tenth century,⁵⁰ and re-emerged powerfully in humanistic treatises such as Poggio Bracciolini's *De infelicitate principum*.⁵¹ Only in the framework of an abstract and morally neutral concept of power as articulated in the work of Machiavelli did a political understanding of monarchy become possible, free both from the shadow of the tyrant and from the medieval idea of the monarch as representative of God. As Leo Strauss pointed out in a famous passage of his work on Xenophon's *Hiero*, with his deliberate indifference to the distinction between king and tyrant, Machiavelli was breaking away from the whole tradition of political science, thereby opening the way to analyze monarchic regimes in a new fashion.⁵² An obvious consequence of this new way of seeing monarchy was Thomas Hobbes's recommendation to erase from Greek and Roman literature all the passages that talk about tyrants,⁵³ but even Hobbes's more central notion of sovereign power was built in the empty space left by Machiavelli's dismantling of the discourse of tyranny. In this new political and theoretical framework, the Greek discourse of tyranny lost much of its plausibility and cultural usefulness. Ultimately, the death of the tyrant opened the way to the emergence of the modern concept of the state.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See G. Klaniczay, 'Representations of the Evil Ruler in the Middle Ages', in *European Monarchy: Its Evolution and Practice from Roman Antiquity to Modern Times*, eds H. Duchhardt, R. A. Jackson, and D. Sturdy, Stuttgart, 1992, pp. 74–5.

⁵¹ See the chapter by Hester Schadee in this volume.

⁵² See L. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, eds V. Gourevitch and M. S. Roth, corr. and exp. edn, Chicago, 2013, p. 24. On this point, Strauss observed a difference between *Il Principe* and *Discorsi*. Seen as a whole, Machiavelli's attitude toward tyranny was rather different from the way it mostly ended up being depicted from the late sixteenth century onward; see A. Prosperi, 'Machiavelli e la tirannia. Note sui "Discorsi"', *Quaderni di Storia*, 71, 2010, pp. 7–28.

⁵³ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. E. Curley, Indianapolis, 1994, II.29, 'Imitation of the Greeks, and Romans'.

⁵⁴ On which see now Q. Skinner, 'A Genealogy of the Modern State', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 162, 2009, pp. 325–70.

2

‘A King Like the Other Nations’

THE FOREIGNNESS OF TYRANNY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Jennie Grillo



THE HEBREW BIBLE is strange in the ancient Near East for questioning the very idea of kingship: Israel, according to powerful voices in its canonical histories, might have been better off with no kings at all.¹ What was almost unthinkable seems also to have proved in practice unworkable in that universe of empires, and large parts of the Hebrew Bible chronicle the histories of the kings that Israel and Judah did in fact have. But the kingship pictured in the Bible is constantly subject to a powerful pull toward its obverse, tyranny, and this pull is resisted only by rare exceptions in the story of Israel and Judah; across its law, history, and prophecy, the Hebrew Bible is full of bad kings. In this essay I will explore one aspect of badness in biblical kingship, which acts as a sort of portmanteau for all the rest: bad kingship is repeatedly imaged as foreign kingship.² Not all foreign kings are bad—there is the messianic Cyrus of the book of Isaiah, or the magnanimous treatment of Abraham by the king of Gerar who has stumbled into marrying his wife—but many bad kings have something of foreignness about them, and an element of foreignness is at the center of what it means to be a bad king; at root, the reasons for this are to be found in the

¹ F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978, p. 76; P. Machinist, ‘Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel’, in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride Jr.*, eds J. T. Strong and S. S. Tuell, Winona Lake, 2005, p. 177.

² I use ‘foreign’ throughout to narrow a broad notion of ‘otherness’ to the axis of ethnicity, though without entering into all the details of how the biblical writers constructed ethnicity. See J. Nederveen Pieterse, ‘Others’, in E. Cashmore, *Dictionary of Race and Race Relations*, 4th edn, London, 1996, pp. 262–4.

irreducibly particular loyalties of biblical religion. In what follows, I am tracing the contours of the Bible's canonical shape to follow the twists and turns of a discussion between different biblical voices; this inner-biblical conversation was pegged to a shared narrative of Israel's historical memory, which may not correspond either to the chronological order of the writings or to the events they represent. Listening in to such a conversation can therefore tell us much about the dialectic of biblical theology, though rather less about the history of religions; it will be my aim to assemble some of the witnesses to the former.

I begin with two passages that set out to define what a bad king will be, and what a good king should be, from 1 Samuel 8 and Deuteronomy 17. When the biblical legislators try to describe a good king, they largely manage to do so only by sketching a bad king from whom the good king can be derived by inversion: this imaginative priority of bad kings over good is part of a wider pattern that the Hebrew Bible repeats in several important ways, as we shall see. In these two foundational passages that constitute a biblical rubric for kingship, the exotic foreignness of bad kings is the unifying pattern in a cluster of other traits. Then, I turn to later layers of the Hebrew Bible in which the idea of the bad king as a foreigner is given further definition by its encounter with a peculiarly complementary tradition of Greek thought and expression; I examine that encounter in the prose fictions from the ancient Jewish diaspora that bear witness to one aspect of Israel's imaginative confrontation with real foreign tyrants. The final feat of bad kings in the Bible is that they manage to bring an end to kingship altogether: after a long history of disappointment with the holders of that post, much of the Hebrew Bible in its final canonical form turns its back on earthly kingship (though not every stream in early Judaism did so, as the Hasmonean and Herodian developments witness). I will conclude with a look at the end of biblical kingship through the lens of one of its most original critics, from the wisdom tradition.

BAD KINGS IN LAW AND HISTORY

Aside from some initial flirtation with kingship in the book of Judges,³ the Hebrew Bible presents the beginnings of Israelite monarchy in the book of 1 Samuel, where Saul is anointed by the prophet Samuel as a reluctant divine concession to the people's plea for a king (1 Sam. 8–12). The biblical account preserves competing perspectives, both welcoming and criticizing the rule of Saul and kingship generally: the critical elements here are variously dated, but even with an exilic date they

³ Judges 8:22–3 and 9:1–22.

form a layer of antiroyal sentiment that is at the foundation of all reflection on kings and kingship in early Judaism and beyond.⁴ Here, kingship inclines inexorably toward tyranny, and in the terms of this critique bad kingship is specifically foreign-inflected, as Samuel warns the people:

‘This will be the way of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and install them for himself in his chariotry and as his horsemen, and they will run before his chariot; and he will install for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and those to do his plowing and to reap his harvest, and to make his weapons of war and the equipment of his chariot. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his courtiers. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give it to his officials and his courtiers. He will take your manservants and your maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you shall be slaves to him. And on that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but Yahweh will not answer you on that day.’ But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, ‘No!—there *will* be a king over us, so that we also may be like all the other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.’ (1 Sam. 8:11–18)⁵

The people’s rallying-cry ‘like other nations’ is at the heart of their request for a king, and the writer translates this into a vignette of foreign absolutism. Isaac Mendelsohn offered a background of second-millennium Canaanite and especially Ugaritic semi-feudal kingship for this subjection to an array of instruments of tyranny (military draft, royal land appropriations, high taxes, and corvée labor);⁶ even without such an early date, there are anyway plenty of other ancient Near Eastern analogues for the declared foreignness of this style of kingship, and if the warning instead issues from—or reflects back on—the time of Solomon, it is Solomon in the mold of the

⁴ For a synthesis of the various proposals on dating, see D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, Grand Rapids, 2007, p. 247. We should note that Saul is not called king (*melek*) but only *nagid*, variously translated as ‘king designate’, ‘crown prince’, or simply ‘commander’; however, the final literary context for the account of his accession is certainly the debate over kingship (*melek*, 1 Samuel 8:5–7). See T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*, Lund, 1976, pp. 151–84.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

⁶ I. Mendelsohn, ‘Samuel’s Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of the Akkadian Documents from Ugarit’, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 143, 1956, pp. 17–22.

typical literary oriental despot.⁷ Whether or not such a style of kingship was in reality so foreign to Israel, the rhetorical move is clear: in Samuel's prophecy of the enslaved people here crying out to an unanswering God, the literary archetype of the oppressing king is Pharaoh, taskmaster of the Exodus generation, so that Ephraim Speiser could call this 'the Egyptian manner' of kingship even though Egypt is not in Samuel's sights.⁸ In the Exodus account, however, Yahweh *did* respond to the cries of his oppressed people, setting up a linked chain of foreign oppression/crying out/divine hearing that is reiterated from the Egyptian exodus throughout the book of Judges; here in 1 Samuel at the inception of the monarchy, that oppression/crying/deliverance pattern is now dramatically reworked so that an Israelite king himself becomes the foreign oppressor from whom God will no longer deliver.⁹

While the institution of tyrannical kingship has a foreign appearance in 1 Samuel 8, the law concerning kingship in the book of Deuteronomy presents the specter of a bad king who is himself actually a foreigner:

When you come into the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the other nations that are around me,' you will indeed set over you a king whom Yahweh your God will choose. From among your brothers you may set a king over you; you must not put a foreign man over you, who is not your brother. Even so, he may not multiply horses for himself, and he may not return the people to Egypt in order to multiply horses, since Yahweh has said to you, 'You must never return that way again.' And he may not acquire many wives for himself, so that his heart will not turn away; and he must not greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. (Deut. 17:14–17)

A genuinely foreign king must here be a largely rhetorical possibility, an abstraction for shock value from the royal vices that follow, all of which share the taint

⁷ R. E. Clements, 'The Deuteronomistic Interpretation of the Founding of the Monarchy in 1 Sam. VIII', *Vetus Testamentum*, 24:1, 1974, p. 403. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, pp. 255–9, gives further Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and West Semitic parallels; for a wider background, see H. J. Boecker, *Die Beurteilung der Anfänge des Königtums in den deuteronomistischen Abschnitten des 1. Samuelbuchs*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969, p. 18.

⁸ E. A. Speiser, 'The Manner of the King', in *The World History of the Jewish People*, 1st ser., vol. 3, ed. B. Mazar, Tel Aviv, 1971, p. 283. See also C. Grottanelli, *Kings and Prophets: Monarchic Power, Inspired Leadership and Sacred Text in Biblical Narrative*, New York, 1999, pp. 34–5, who suggests reading the Samuel text synoptically with Genesis 47's account of Israel's enslavement in Egypt under Joseph. L. Eslinger also finds memories of the Egyptian slavery in vv. 17–18, *The Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1–12*, Sheffield, 1985, pp. 275–8.

⁹ Exodus 2:23–5; 3:7; 3:9; Judges 2:18; 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6–8; 10:10–16. For the roots of the Judges pattern in the Exodus narrative, see D. Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, London, 1963, pp. 11–12, 21, 27.

of foreignness.¹⁰ Patricia Dutcher-Walls sees the three prohibitions here (many horses, many wives, much gold) each as an effort to limit foreign entanglement;¹¹ in a seventh-century context for these verses, avoiding foreign entanglements would be a way of placating the jealousy of the Assyrian overlord, but there is also plenty of native Israelite horror of foreignness here. Within the larger context of Deuteronomy's program, this law strives to differentiate a kingship seen as peculiarly Israelite in character against the ancient Near Eastern style: an army of holy warriors relying on their God rather than Canaanite dependence on chariots;¹² no crowd of wives, in striking contrast with the harem as symbol of power and affluence in other ancient Near Eastern royal centers;¹³ and a circumscription of powers creating a role that Gordon McConville calls 'the antithesis of that of the ANE monarch'.¹⁴ Here, too, the shade of Pharaoh hovers behind the threat of a bad king: sending (exchanging?) Israelites 'that way again' to Egypt for horses reverses the Exodus typology and raises the chilling possibility of a king of Israel now enslaving Israelites in Egypt, just as Pharaoh had done.

Much political law in the book of Deuteronomy is, as here, essentially utopian, enshrining an ideal vision of shared governance that is honored more in the breach than in the observance in the 'deuteronomistic' narrative histories that measure the kings of Israel and Judah by the standards of this law. When we move from the idealism of Deuteronomy's law to the narratives representing lived experience of kingship, we find numerous exemplars of the tyrannical type, and here again bad kings are frequently characterized by the language of foreignness. Turning from the warnings of Samuel and the deuteronomist's Moses to the historians' Solomon, it is impossible not to feel a certain queasiness about his royal splendors, with the legislators' warnings hanging in the air: we read of his forty thousand stalls of chariot horses and twelve thousand horsemen (1 Kings 5:6; cf. 10:26–9); his Egyptian wife, taken in marriage-alliance with Pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1) alongside seven hundred

¹⁰ For this clause as a religious requirement rather than a reflection of an actual historical possibility, see G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History*, Atlanta, 1986, pp. 109–11. E. Nicholson, however, argues that the Assyrian king is in mind, reflecting the perspective of Judah as client state: "Do not dare to set a foreigner over you": The King in Deuteronomy and the "Great King", in idem, *Deuteronomy and the Judaean Diaspora*, Oxford, 2014, pp. 117–34.

¹¹ P. Dutcher-Walls, "The Circumscription of the King: Deuteronomy 17:16–17 in Its Ancient Social Context", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 121:4, 2002, p. 604.

¹² P. C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, London, 1976, pp. 254–6; for a broader ancient Near Eastern context, see Y. Ikeda, 'Solomon's Trade in Horses and Chariots in Its International Setting', in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon*, ed. T. Ishida, Winona Lake, 1982, pp. 215–38.

¹³ G. Knoppers, 'Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History: The Case of Kings', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 63:3, 2001, p. 402.

¹⁴ G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Leicester, 2002, p. 305.

princesses and three hundred concubines of foreign extraction, bringing with them their seductive foreign worship (1 Kings 11:1–5); his corvée labor (1 Kings 5:27); and his quantities of treasure that add exoticism to opulence—not just gold and silver but also spices and monkeys (1 Kings 9:28, 10:10–27). This is standard literary oriental despotism, and it is in particular the foreignness of Solomon's wives and his worship that leads to the historians' verdict that 'Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord' (1 Kings 11:6).¹⁵ This connection to foreignness is an authorial emphasis and not simple reporting: observing the spread of nationalities in the list of Solomon's wives at 1 Kings 11:1, John Van Seters suggests that contemporary competitors (Moabites and the rest) are deliberately combined with Israel's ancient enemies (Hittites); thus the passage brings what Kenton Sparks calls the 'rhetorical other' of Israel's archaic opponents into the realm of the 'objective other'.¹⁶ It is a moot point whether Deuteronomy's law of the king has influenced the historians' literary presentation of Solomon, or vice versa, or whether an actual reality of Solomon's reign (or the reigns of other kings) has influenced the formulation of the law.¹⁷ This last possibility reflects a facet of the derivative relationship between bad kings and the ideal king: if the utopian law of the ideal king is composed in reaction to the historical experience of dystopian real Israelite kingship, then in conception as well as in representation the ideal king in the Hebrew Bible is only a secondary deduction from the prior figure of the bad king.¹⁸

Bad kingship continues in this pattern: in the books of 1 and 2 Kings, many of the monarchs of the post-Solomonic divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah pass by in no more than a few sentences, but of those figures who are more fully realized, several who earn a negative verdict from the deuteronomistic historians are also characterized as in some way foreign. The tyrant Rehoboam is, we are twice reminded, Ammonite on his mother's side (1 Kings 14:21, 31). Ahab, who 'did evil in the sight

¹⁵ M. Sweeney, 'The Critique of Solomon in the Josianic Edition of the Deuteronomistic History', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 114:4, 1995, pp. 607–22. Some scholars see a break between a favorable characterization of Solomon in the early chapters of Kings and a later decline, but for the early seeds of that judgment cf. J. T. Walsh, 'The Characterization of Solomon in First Kings 1–5', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 57:3, 1995, pp. 471–93.

¹⁶ J. Van Seters, 'The Terms "Amorite" and "Hittite" in the Old Testament', *Vetus Testamentum*, 22:1, 1972, p. 68; K. L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible*, Winona Lake, 1988, p. 273. But I am grateful to Peter Machinist for pointing out to me that 'Hittites' nevertheless has an ongoing referent, in its use as the Assyrian name for all of the western Levant, or 'Hattu'.

¹⁷ For close consideration of the direction of these relationships, see W. Dietrich, 'History and Law: Deuteronomistic Historiography and Deuteronomic Law Exemplified in the Passage from the Period of the Judges to the Monarchical Period', in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, eds A. de Pury, T. Römer, and J.-D. Macchi, Sheffield, 2000, pp. 315–42.

¹⁸ For this order of composition, see F. García López, 'Le roi d'Israël: Dt 17, 14–20', in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, ed. N. Lohfink, Leuven, 1985, pp. 277–97.

of the Lord more than all who were before him' (1 Kings 16:30), takes (and eventually takes his orders from) a foreign wife, the Sidonian Jezebel, daughter of King Ethbaal, and institutionalizes the worship of her foreign god Baal (1 Kings 16:31–2); the foreignness of Jezebel is stressed by the strange speech forms the narrator gives her, possibly a northern dialect to reflect her Phoenician origins.¹⁹ Ahab's worst offense is 'going after idols, as the Amorites had done' (1 Kings 21:26); he is distinguished by his concern for his horses (1 Kings 18:5) and by his ivory palace (1 Kings 22:39). In every iteration of this pattern, the crucial factor in understanding why foreignness is so very bad as a style of kingship in the Hebrew Bible is the intimate connection made by the deuteronomistic historians between Israel's ethnic identity and its religious commitments.²⁰ In the Hebrew Bible, exactly as in the rest of the ancient Near East from Sumer to the neo-Babylonian empire, a bad king is defined in overwhelmingly religious terms; the difference is simply the name of the deity. A bad king of Israel and Judah is, definitionally, a defaulter from faithful worship of Yahweh; and in this small and surrounded polity, unfaithfulness to Yahweh always means leaning toward foreign gods instead. A foreign style of kingship, then, is at its root religiously suspect.

ISRAEL UNDER EMPIRE: NEW WAYS OF SPEAKING OF BAD KINGS

Late in Israel and Judah's literary history, this way of defining bad kingship as foreign encountered a Greek current of thought that was both ideologically congenial to it and able to furnish a new literary vocabulary for expressing the foreignness of tyranny. From the post-exilic period onward, we find Jewish writers borrowing that Greek stereotype of the Persian king which inhabits a wide range of Greek texts and traditions from Aeschylus' *Persians* onward. This is the character represented by, for example, the splendid and autocratic Xerxes of Herodotus, who adorns a plane tree with gold; kings like this are most often found in settings like the Persian court of the Greek novel *Callirhoe*, which Philip and Loveday Alexander call 'full-blooded Oriental splendor worthy of Cecil B. DeMille'.²¹ While this stereotyped character was by no means the only way, and certainly not the most accurate way, that the Greeks spoke about the Persian king, it undoubtedly had a wide popular currency and gave Jewish writers a new way of speaking about bad kings that had a satisfying ethnographic continuity with their traditional way of speaking about bad

¹⁹ G. Rendsburg, *Israelian Hebrew in the Books of Kings*, Bethesda, 2002, pp. 71, 111, 116.

²⁰ For this connection, see Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity*, esp. pp. 125–68.

²¹ P. Alexander and L. Alexander, 'The Image of the Oriental Monarch in the Third Book of Maccabees', in *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers*, eds T. Rajak et al., Berkeley, 2007, p. 102.

kings.²² Of course, all kings *were* foreign now, and remained so until the (temporary) Hasmonean resurgence: the fall of Jerusalem to the neo-Babylonian empire in 586 BCE meant that from a Judahite perspective the king no longer sat on the throne in Jerusalem but had been replaced by a rotating succession of distant rulers in faraway capitals. Nevertheless, the foreign element in the late biblical sketches of these new overlords is more than just an accidental corollary of the fact that all kings were henceforth Babylonian, or Persian, or Greek: the foreignness in these portraits is now exaggerated and clichéd; it has become a topos of the description of a bad king.

A case in point is the painting of the Persian court in the late biblical book of Esther: this set piece makes use of Greek devices for exaggerating the otherness of the Persian king Xerxes and renders him as a caricature of a foreign tyrant. The book opens with a royal banquet scene in Susa, summed up by Michael V. Fox as ‘frilly burlesque’ (‘a world of crude but cheerful ostentation’):²³ at this banquet the guest list includes all of Ahasuerus’ officials and ministers, the army of Persia and Media, and the nobles and governors of the provinces, with all the citizens of Susa invited for a week-long after-party to end the 180 days of the banquet.²⁴ During the banquet, we are told, the decorations were blue and white hangings tied with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars; for seating, couches of gold and silver were arranged on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stones; drinks were served in golden goblets of different kinds, and the royal wine was poured out according to the bounty of the king, in flagons, without restraint (1:6–8). The party ends with Ahasuerus sending his seven eunuchs to fetch the queen, crowned, in order to display her beauty to his guests: she refuses, and he is enraged (1:10–12).

All these features in the biblical sketch belong to the Greek idea of barbarian kings: Pierre Briant has documented the fascination of Greek writers with the banquets of the Persian court, and as a representative of the Greek attitude he

²² Among the substantial literature on this figure, I have drawn especially on E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford/New York, 1989; P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience: From the Archaic Period to the Age of Xenophon*, Baltimore, 1994; T. Long, *Barbarians in Greek Comedy*, Carbondale, 1986, pp. 95–102; and P. Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford, 1993; all scholarship on this subject of course takes as its point of departure Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, New York, 1978. For analysis of the gap between Greek literary presentation and Persian or Seleucid reality, see the seven volumes in the series *Achaemenid History*, esp. vol. 2: *The Greek Sources*, eds H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, Leiden, 1987.

²³ M. V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 28; cf. also p. 23.

²⁴ Esther 1:1–5. ‘Ahasuerus’ is the Hebrew writer’s approximation of the Persian name, which English, via Greek, renders as ‘Xerxes’, although the Septuagint has in fact identified Artaxerxes here.

cites Plutarch, putting a typical reaction to Persian royal style onto the lips of Alexander:

Darius' tent, which was full of splendid furniture and quantities of gold and silver, they reserved for Alexander himself. . . . When he beheld the bathing vessels, the water pots, the pans, and the ointment boxes, all of gold curiously wrought, and smelt the fragrant odours with which the whole place was exquisitely perfumed, and from thence passed into a pavilion of great size and height, where the couches and tables and preparations for an entertainment were perfectly magnificent, he turned to those about him and said, 'This, it seems, is royalty'.²⁵

Plutarch's point is amply made: the essence of Eastern kingly style is unfamiliar, fascinating, but reprehensible luxury. The studied exoticism of the biblical writer's presentation, evident in the minute listing of vessels, fabric and furniture, the flowing wine, and the hurrying gaggle of eunuchs, is easy to parallel in every detail from Greek sources;²⁶ the topos of the exposure of the queen to the voyeurism of the king's guests also belongs to Greek ideas of how foreign tyrants behave.²⁷ Granted that the Esther tale quite likely has Persian folkloristic origins, this literary treatment nevertheless bears the impression of the Greek image of the Persian court; Fox draws comparisons with the same in Herodotus and occasionally Thucydides and takes the view that the author of Esther learned his descriptive technique from the Hellenistic romances.²⁸

Tyranny is equally exaggeratedly foreign in the cycle of tales from the Jewish diaspora that have been collected into the first half of the book of Daniel, and here again the biblical texts duplicate Greek literary resources for rendering the bad king as an exotic 'other'; in doing so, they put their own spin on older Semitic literary resources, as the parallel existence of the Nabonidus/Nebuchadnezzar story in the *Qumran Prayer of Nabonidus* makes clear. There is a stereotypically oriental cast to absolutism here too, just as in Esther: the dramatic tension in at least one story in Daniel turns

²⁵ Alex. XX:12–13, cited according to P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, transl. P. T. Daniels, Winona Lake, 2002, p. 257; see also pp. 255–301.

²⁶ For Greek descriptions of the fabric and furnishings of the Great King's portable banquet tent, see the sources assembled in Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 256–7, 288 (Quintus Curtius, Herodotus, Athenaeus); for the Greek writers' fascination with Persian drinking cups, see Xenophon, *Cyr.* I.3.8; Athenaeus XI.781f–782a; and Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 294–7; for Persian fondness for wine, see Herodotus I.133, III.34; Athenaeus IV.145c; for eunuchs, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 268–77.

²⁷ Compare the episode of Gyges and that of the Persian guests of Amyntas in Herodotus I.8 and V.18.

²⁸ Fox, *Character and Ideology*, p. 18; see also A. Berlin, *Esther*, Philadelphia, 2001, esp. pp. xxviii–xxxii, xlii–xliii, 4–5, 8–10, though she prefers a model of parallel emergence from the same literary milieu as the Greek historians rather than the later romance writers.

on the motif of the unchangeable royal law of the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 6:8, 12, 15); this is a topos also known in Esther (1:18; 8:8, 'a writ which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked') and in Greek sources, as at Diodorus XVII.30, where even Darius III himself finds that 'it was not possible to undo what was done by royal authority'.²⁹ Fits of rage are also a typical feature of the literary oriental despot, and the characteristic vice of the Persian monarchs in Herodotus;³⁰ in Daniel, likewise, we meet King Nebuchadnezzar overcome with rage (2:12, 3:19, 3:19), feared for his punishments (1:10), issuing peremptory orders (2:2) or petulant threats with one hand and lavish gifts with the other (2:5–6). Tessa Rajak adds the further Jewish-Greek examples of Judith's Nebuchadnezzar (1:12, 5:2), Antiochus in 2 Maccabees (7:39) and 4 Maccabees (8:2ff.), and Ptolemy Philopator in 3 Maccabees (1:9–12 and throughout);³¹ we even meet the devil disguised as a Persian king in the Testament of Job (17:2). Across a wide swath of early Jewish texts, then, tyranny is characterized by a cluster of features all deriving their imaginative power from a controlling matrix of foreignness.

What has happened here is that a Greek stream of thought has met up with a Jewish stream of older Hebrew origins that was particularly receptive to it, and the confluence of these two is what creates the shared 'orientalizing' perspective of Jewish and Greek ideas of tyranny. In the suspicion of monarchy as 'foreign' that lies behind the limiting legislation of Deuteronomy and the warnings of 1 Samuel, there is an ancient Hebrew tradition of political philosophy that comes close to the idea of a 'constitutional' monarchy, and which—together with Greek ideas about democracy—lies behind important strands of early modern and modern constitutional theory, as Baruch Halpern has argued.³² Speaking for a slightly later period, Philip and Loveday Alexander track the parallels between Hebrew and Greek ideas of the proper limits on kingship, and the growing sense in both literatures of the East as a place of exotic and somehow suspect difference, where government is altogether otherwise organized. They point to a particularly potent fusion of the two traditions in the Greek-speaking world of Hellenistic Judaism, where there is a substantial convergence of political horizons; although, importantly, 'the Greek opposition to absolute monarchy tends to be rooted in a sense of innate individual liberty, whereas the Jewish tends to be rooted in a concept of a Law of God that embraces equally both king and commoner, and that prescribes limits to royal power'.³³

²⁹ Cited in J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 267–8.

³⁰ Seen in the sudden violence of his Darius (in the incident of Oeobazus' sons at IV.84, or that of Intaphrenes' family at III.18) and Cambyases.

³¹ T. Rajak, 'The Angry Tyrant', in *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers*, pp. 110–27.

³² B. Halpern, *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel*, Chico, 1981.

³³ Alexander and Alexander, 'The Image of the Oriental Monarch', p. 104. Nathan MacDonald finds a similar convergence of Greek and Israelite critiques of conspicuous consumption in the particular case of feasting

TWO KINDS OF TYRANT, TWO KINDS OF FOREIGNNESS

Having found this rather exact equation of bad kings with foreignness in two particular corners of biblical literature (the law of Deuteronomy together with its cognate histories on the one hand, and the cluster of diaspora tales on the other), the reader is left with the question of why we encounter that trope in these places and not elsewhere in the corpus. In particular, why is it that exaggerated foreignness is a feature of bad *native* kings in deuteronomistic sources, but only of bad *foreign* kings in the latest, novelistic strata of biblical literature? This distribution is all the stranger given that elsewhere in the Bible we meet plenty of kings who are actually foreign, and who are certainly bad from the biblical writers' perspective, but their foreignness itself is, oddly, not made much of: I am thinking of the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian rulers endlessly conjured up in prophetic threat and historical lament as the devouring invader from the north. The way that the biblical writers treat the foreignness of monarchs such as these, feared and hated though they were, is wholly different than the stereotyped, polemical caricature of foreignness foisted onto sometimes the very same Mesopotamian kings when they appear in the diaspora tales, or the renegade kings of Israel and Judah in the deuteronomistic work. Peter Machinist has studied the imprint of the neo-Assyrian kings on the Hebrew Bible; from this it emerges that the depiction of those rulers was overwhelmingly in their own terms, that is, in images culled from their own official propaganda (e.g., the heroic journey to the western mountains to cut down trees for building, claimed by Shalmaneser III and Sennacherib in their own annals and boasted of by the Assyrian king in Isaiah 37:24).³⁴ Certainly these are often inverted (Machinist notes that trees in their turn rejoice at the death of the Assyrian king, in a defiant reworking of the motif at Isaiah 14:8), but in these cases the biblical writers still seem to operate from inside the Mesopotamian symbolic lexicon as the dominant paradigm: there is no exaggerated exoticism, no sense of a deviation from a natural norm such as we have seen in texts like Deuteronomy 17. Paradoxically, being significantly and perversely foreign seems like something only an Israelite or Judean king is capable of, until the diaspora tales; foreignness in kingship, it seems, can best be realized relative to native kingship.

One answer to this puzzle is simply that the later prose fictions like Esther and Daniel make use of a literary resource that was not part of the Bible writers' vocabulary before the encounter with Hellenism. However, this fails to explain why the

in the diaspora novellas: see his *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament*, Oxford/New York, 2008, pp. 211–16.

³⁴ P. Machinist, 'Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 102:4, 1983, pp. 719–37.

earlier laws and histories are able to make use of a stereotyped topos of foreignness in describing bad native kings, quite without the help of a Hellenistic milieu. A more comprehensive solution emerges by adapting a typology of different kinds of Other proposed by Carol Newsom in a recent study of Gentile kings in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism.³⁵ Seeing foreign-style native kings and bona fide foreign kings as each presenting a distinctively different challenge to Israelite identity may provide a way to understand the Bible writers' tendency to dwell on the foreignness only of the former. Newsom's first kind of Other (leaving aside Lacanian uses) is 'that person or group of people symbolically constructed as foreign or alien so as to serve as a definitional boundary for the self or one's own group';³⁶ in her analysis, this kind of Other emerges in the dialogical relationship in Psalm 2 between Yahweh and his king on the one hand and the 'kings of the earth' on the other hand (warrior kings must have opponents, who are roughly equal and opposite). For Newsom, 'Other' in this sense has only a limited usefulness in describing the Gentile kings of the Hebrew Bible; but I suggest that it could also usefully describe the Israelite and Judean bad kings of the deuteronomistic work. These bad kings are defined in opposition to the ideal of a good king by exactly the process that Newsom outlines, and they are thus quite neatly 'the devalued half of a binary opposition', the 'definitional other' that is necessary to the construction of a self; we have observed this process of identity-building in the way that the ideal Israelite king is shaped as a negative image of the bad king in Deuteronomy 17.

Newsom's second kind of Other corresponds, conversely, to the real foreign kings whom we meet in biblical history and prophecy: she borrows from Levinas to describe an Other understood 'not in terms of that which is opposite to me but rather as that which is separate from me, that which is radically exterior to me'; it is this kind of Other that, disturbingly, 'makes me aware that the world is not simply my possession or an extension of me, but that I share the world'. This kind of Other presents more intractable problems than an Other that can be contained inside a binary opposition, in her analysis of the relationship between Israel's God and foreign kings: 'The ideological claims concerning sovereignty that are made on behalf of any divine king are more or less incompatible with sharing the world with another sovereign who makes ultimate claims.'³⁷ Applied to the present problem, this typology of two kinds of Other provides a way of understanding the different biblical treatment

³⁵ C. A. Newsom, 'God's Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature', in *The 'Other' in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, eds D. C. Harlow et al., Grand Rapids, 2011, pp. 31–49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

of genuinely foreign kings: kings like a Nebuchadnezzar or a Sennacherib are not merely a bad version of a good ruler, as is Ahab or the later Solomon, but rather are world-sharers, who present a threat not by their divergence from type but by their actual existence; the problem is not so much their foreignness as the fact of their kingship, setting up a rule that makes totalizing claims within a sphere where there is not enough room for all the contestants. Seeing Israelite/Judahite kings and Assyrian/Babylonian/Egyptian kings fall into these two categories of Other illuminates the separate ways of speaking about them: the otherness of a bad king of Israel can be described as a 'foreign' deviation from what becomes a 'domestic' pattern of government, whereas the threat posed by the king of another empire is more radical than simply his foreignness. A focus on foreignness makes less sense in the treatment of a truly foreign king because it is not the narrow point of contention, as with a native king acting in a foreign style; rather, the foreignness of an Assyrian monarch is only one aspect of the much larger problem with which the prophets and the historians are wrestling, facing the affront to their worldview of a claim to sovereignty from a completely different direction. The later reappearance of foreignness as a defining characteristic of the Eastern kings of the diaspora stories could be, by implication, a measure of the extent to which these kings have been domesticated: in the newfound confidence of the diaspora perspective, Nebuchadnezzar and Xerxes are now local kings rather than world-sharers and have been demoted to a threat level that can fit inside a binary opposition to a resurgent Jewish identity.

THE END OF KINGSHIP

One final biblical bad king provides a twist on the uses of foreignness in early Jewish understandings of national identity. In repurposing a borrowed Greek motif, this is also perhaps the most rhetorically well-wrought of the Hebrew Bible's critiques of its own native kings, as well as the last fully formed king of Israel to leave the pen of a Hebrew Bible writer. The book of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes, in its Greek translation) is another of the late biblical sketches of a king whose Eastern garb is the instrument of the author's satire; but if this text trades in the same cultural currency as the other biblical users of the Greek Eastern-king motif, it does so in the service of very different ideological ends. The book is placed by most scholars in the third century BCE and probably was written in Jerusalem; it could perhaps be a century earlier but not much later, as the earliest fragments found at Qumran date to the middle to late second century.³⁸ While the most obvious presence behind the fictional speaker

³⁸ See T. Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, transl. O. C. Dean Jr, Minneapolis, 2004, p. 19; for a (minority) Persian-period date, see C.-L. Scow, *Ecclesiastes*, New York, 1997, pp. 11–29.

is Solomon ('The words of Qohelet, son of David, king over Israel in Jerusalem', 1:1), there are shades here of the whole history of the kings of Israel and Judah: this king is a composite, a sort of Everyking. The critical lens through which the author views the eponymous fictional royal speaker is apparent in the book's relentless questioning of every proposed human accomplishment. He is presented most fully in the 'royal boast' of the book's first narrative section:

I made my works great; I built houses for myself and planted vineyards for myself; I made for myself gardens and parks, and planted in them trees of every kind of fruit. I made for myself pools from which to water a forest shooting forth trees. I bought manservants and maidservants, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got for myself male singers and female singers, and the delights of men, coffers and coffers of them.³⁹ So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I did not keep my heart from any pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil; and this was my portion for all my toil. (Ecc. 2:4–10)

The setting here could again be the court of the book of Esther, with its identical local color of royal gardens, gold and silver, royal treasuries, tribute, and wine; there is a similar note of infinite luxurious possibility in the 'rule of no restrictions' at the banquet in Esther 1:8 and in Qohelet's 'I did not keep my heart from any pleasure', 2:10. Qohelet's summary of his ostentatious accomplishments resembles the conspicuous consumption of Esther's Ahasuerus; both are writing within an established set of literary conventions. Points of contact with the barbarian tyrants of Jewish and Greek literature are evident in Qohelet's wealth and works; his cunningly constructed Persian-style gardens; his gathering of the tribute of the provinces like Briant's oriental monarch, the 'gigantic magnet' at the center of empire;⁴⁰ his overstaffed court; his lazy silence about the martial exploits we would expect in the first-person royal boast of a real ancient Near Eastern king; and his *carpe diem* melancholy. What is interesting about the oriental despot in the book of Ecclesiastes, in contrast to Esther, Daniel, and other Jewish Greek fictions, is what the author is doing with this motif.

³⁹ The translation of *šiddah we-šiddot* is difficult here; I have adopted the solution of Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 131–2.

⁴⁰ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 200–201; cf. also p. 193.

Eric Gruen and John J. Collins have discerned the comedy and playfulness in the portraits of Eastern kings like Esther's Ahasuerus or Daniel's Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, where satire works in the service of refashioning the Jewish self-image at the expense of foreign rulers.⁴¹ For these texts, the motif of the foreign tyrant becomes a means of wry resistance to an occupying power, a mode of surviving and thriving by wits and humor; it is a strategy of comic subversion rather than regime change. The effect of the Eastern-king tradition in the book of Ecclesiastes, however, is almost a mirror image, a complete reverse of those emphases: instead of an optimistic view of the world and a positive construction of Jewish identity, we have here pessimism and a deeply critical look at national tradition. The great difference is that King Qohelet is a king of Israel, and the setting is not the diaspora but Jerusalem. We could say that all the 'othering' goes in the opposite direction: everything critical and satirical that is elsewhere implied about a foreign king by the use of this motif is here being imputed to a king over all Israel in Jerusalem who at the least represents Israel's greatest king and probably has something of every Israelite and Judean king in him. Instead of refashioning the Jewish self-image at the expense of foreign rulers as his biblical contemporaries do, the writer of Ecclesiastes is using the same motif for a pessimistic refashioning of the Jewish self-image at the expense of the nation's own past rulers, Solomon and his successors. Painting the king of Israel in Jerusalem with foreign colors in fact recapitulates the charge found in 1 Samuel 8 and Deuteronomy 17: here, in a very different strand of Israel's canonical literature, Israelite kingship is weighed in the same balance and again found wanting.

This latest and most sophisticated biblical critique of the nation's practice of kingship runs alongside the displacement of kings altogether in late biblical literature: after the Exile, Yahweh himself seems to replace an earthly king in Israel. There is a long-running debate in biblical scholarship over when exactly Yahweh came to be spoken of as king of Israel, at the nation's origins or as a late development;⁴² but even if the notion itself is old, it certainly gathers strength and stress later on. Once the Babylonian Exile has been explained within a theological framework of the failure of Israel's kings, the voices proclaiming Yahweh as king of Israel become louder and louder (see, for instance, Ezekiel 20:33, 'As I live, says the Lord Yahweh,

⁴¹ E. S. Gruen, 'Persia through the Jewish Looking-Glass', in *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers*, pp. 53–75; see also idem, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge, MA, 2002, and *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, Berkeley, 1998; J. J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids, 2000; idem, '“The King Has Become a Jew”: The Perspective on the Gentile World in *Bel and the Snake*', in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism*, eds J. A. Overman and R. S. MacLennan, Atlanta, 1992, pp. 105–17.

⁴² For a survey, see K. W. Whitelam, 'King and Kingship', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman, vol. 4, New York, 1992, pp. 40–48 (43).

surely with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will reign over you').⁴³ The end of kingship in the Hebrew Bible, then, gives way to the ultimate enthronement of Yahweh as king of Israel; this last twist is the most surprising repetition in the pattern of a good king being defined by opposition to a bad. In view of all the subsequent development of kingship theory built on the biblical foundation of God as king, there is great irony in the premises of the entire enterprise: in the Hebrew Bible, God as king was in one sense a secondary development from the failure of human kingship, and this best of kings also took on new clarity as a mirror image of bad ones. Seen in this light, the whole edifice of kingship theory is, no less that the institution of Israelite kingship at its biblical origins, built on a fault.

⁴³ See P. M. Joyce, 'King and Messiah in Ezekiel', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Day, Sheffield, 1998, pp. 323–37.

3

Discourse of Kingship in Late Republican Invective

Yelena Baraz



MY CONTRIBUTION TO this volume's investigation of evil lords focuses on the late Roman Republic, when discussions of tyrannical behavior were fed by the persistent and powerful shadow of a bad king from a time long past. By the end of the Republic, Julius Caesar had emerged as the new focal point of Roman discourse on bad kingship and tyranny. This discourse was indelibly shaped by the earlier Roman tradition, and itself continued to shape political language and thought for centuries, or indeed millennia. The need to avoid the equation Caesar = Rex underlay the problem of imperial legitimacy discussed by Aloys Winterling in the next chapter. Furthermore, the association of Caesar with kingship as well as tyranny made by Cicero posed a challenge to political theorists throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Nonetheless, as I will show, in contemporary Rome this language was not—nor was it meant to be—reflective of any actual monarchical aspirations on the part of those against whom it was wielded: rather, it was available for manipulation as a political tool. Ironically, it is precisely the misunderstanding of the situational character of this discourse that ensured its longevity.

The expulsion of the Roman kings, which gave birth to the Republic, was a legendary event with very real consequences for republican political discourse. The virtues of the Republic were constructed in opposition to the vices of the monarchy, which were perceived as having led to its downfall. Despite the fact

that, throughout its history, Rome maintained diplomatic relations and alliances with foreign kings, the centrality of the expulsion to the Romans' conception of their political order caused the very words 'king' and 'kingship' to become terms of opprobrium. What is more, in extolling the merits of their political system, Romans of the Republic prided themselves on their hatred of kingly power and one-man rule generally. The hatred of kingship and self-definition in opposition to it was in theory a thread that united all Romans. However, like many terms of abuse encountered over and over again in late republican invective,¹ the accusation of aspiring to kingship, or of kingly behavior, also provided politicians with a ready-made label to denounce their opponents in a way that was recognizable and damning. The discourse of tyranny in the late Republic has been studied primarily in terms of the models of Hellenistic kingship,² but in this chapter I focus on a different segment of the same field, one that is emphatically Roman in both its origins and its implications.³

The qualities associated with kingship in this context cluster around the figure of the last Roman king, whose violent behavior and abuse of the rights of his subjects led to the overthrow of monarchy in Rome. The story of Tarquin the Proud, told in most detail at the end of the first book of Livy's *History*, emphasizes crime and oppression not only by Tarquin himself but also by members of his family, especially his wife, Tullia, and his son Sextus. Tullia goads her husband to overthrow her father, Servius Tullius, and then rides her carriage over the old man's body, a crime against piety in its three major components: the family, the state, and the sacral. Sextus' subsequent rape of Lucretia, the wife of an aristocrat and a kinsman, finally causes Lucius Junius Brutus to lead the people in revolt against the kings. The

¹ See in general I. Opelt, *Die lateinischen Schimpfwörter und verwandte sprachliche Erscheinungen*, Heidelberg, 1965; on Cicero and the late Republic, G. Achard, *Pratique rhétorique et idéologie politique dans les discours 'optimates' de Cicéron*, Leiden, 1981; A. Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humor in the Late Republic*, Princeton, 1996; also T. N. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature*, Princeton, 1998, ch. 3 on *latrocinium* (banditry); C. A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, Oxford, 1999, on terms designating effeminacy and homosexuality, with C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*, Cambridge/New York, 1993, ch. 2 on *mollitia* (softness).

² E. Rawson, 'Caesar's Heritage: Hellenistic Kings and Their Roman Equals', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 65, 1975, pp. 148–59; A. Bell, *Spectacular Power in the Greek and Roman City*, Oxford/New York, 2004, ch. 2, on Caesar; I. Gildenhard, *Creative Eloquence: The Construction of Reality in Cicero's Speeches*, Oxford, 2010, pp. 85–92, on Cicero's speeches; and idem, 'Reckoning with Tyranny: Greek Thoughts on Caesar in Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* in 49', in *Ancient Tyranny*, ed. S. Lewis, Edinburgh, 2006, pp. 197–209.

³ For a full discussion of the Tarquins' behavior as exemplifying republican anti-values, see Y. Baraz, 'From Vice to Virtue: The Denigration and Rehabilitation of *Superbia* in Ancient Rome', in *Kakos: Badness and Anti-value in Classical Antiquity*, eds I. Sluiter and R. M. Rosen, Leiden, 2008, pp. 365–97; see also P. M. Martin, *L'idée de royauté à Rome*, vol. 1, Clermont-Ferrand, 1982, pp. 277–86, on Tarquin; and idem, *L'idée de royauté à Rome*, vol. 2, Clermont-Ferrand, 1994, pp. 71–6, on royal vices in republican discourse.

Tarquins, as they emerge from Livy's narrative, as well as from other sources, are associated with violent disregard for the rights and values of the broader community over which they hold power.

The importance of the very words that designate kingly power, such as *rex* (king), *regnum* (kingship), and *regnare* (to wield royal power), to the identity formation of the Republic is well illustrated by Livy's narrative of the events that followed the overthrow. As Livy tells it at the opening of Book 2, Brutus was concerned that the unavoidable continuity of institutions in the aftermath of the expulsion would open the young republic to a reintroduction of kingship. Thus, one of his first actions was to administer an oath to the people that they would not allow a king to rule Rome again.⁴ The first opportunity to test the oath was presented to Brutus by the very identity of his co-consul, the husband of the violated Lucretia, Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus. A victim of the Tarquins, he was also a member of the same gens, and in Livy's presentation, the name alone, Tarquinius, was sufficient to create suspicion in the people that he posed a danger to their newly won freedom. On this point Livy is quite emphatic: 'although he gave no offense at all, his name was hateful to the citizenry'.⁵ Brutus called the people together and in their first public meeting identified Collatinus as a continuation of the king's family and name.⁶ Invoking the oath, he asked Collatinus to go into voluntary exile and then led the Senate in passing a decree of exile for all the members of the Tarquin family. Cicero presents the same episode in the third book *On Duties* as an example of the honorable and the beneficial coming together to justify an action:

When Brutus was seeking to annul the power of Collatinus, his colleague, it could appear that he was doing so unjustly; for that man had been an ally and a supporter of his plans to expel the kings. However, when the leaders of the state had adopted the following plan, namely, that the kindred of Tarquin the Proud and the name of the Tarquins, as well as the memory of kingship, had to be destroyed, what was beneficial—to take care of the state—was also so honorable that it ought to have satisfied even Collatinus himself.⁷

⁴ Liv. 2.1.9: 'populum . . . iure iurando adegit neminem Romae passuros regnare'.

⁵ Liv. 2.2.3: 'cum nihil aliud offenderet, nomen invisum civitati fuit'. All translations are my own.

⁶ Liv. 2.2.6: 'regium genus, regium nomen'.

⁷ Cic. *Off.* 3.40: 'cum Collatino collegae Brutus imperium abrogabat, poterat videri facere id iniuste; fuerat enim in regibus expellendis socius Bruti consiliorum et adiutor. cum autem consilium hoc principes cepissent, cognationem Superbi nomenque Tarquiniurum et memoriam regni esse tollendam, quod erat utile, patriae consulere, id erat ita honestum, ut etiam ipsi Collatino placere deberet'.

Besides underscoring the importance of names,⁸ which we already saw in Livy, Cicero's account points to a connection between names and memory,⁹ and to a desire on the part of the ruling class to extinguish any reminder of their past debased condition.¹⁰ At the same time, Cicero's comment that even Collatinus should have been pleased by the events that included his own exile reveals an additional feature of the kingship discourse: the assumption that its terms are universally accepted. As we shall see shortly, this is key to understanding its functioning in the late Republic.

After the expulsion, the name and vices of the last king became synonymous with the institution of kingship. The tradition of kingship discourse under the Republic demonstrates that, in the absence of actual Tarquins to serve as scapegoats for fears about the stability of the Republic, the function first performed by the name Tarquinius in the Collatinus episode was transferred to the word *rex* itself. And, while the motives of Livy's Brutus appear free from self-interest, the subsequent history of the political deployment of the term shows that Rome's statesmen well recognized the word's potential to elicit a violent response in defense of the people's freedom. It is well known that the senatorial elite successfully used the accusation of aspiring to kingship against men associated with popular politics.¹¹ But the focus on these figures tends to obscure what an examination of the late republican texts brings to the fore: that is, the ubiquity and elasticity of this accusation.¹² It is a tool used not only at moments of great crisis but also in less dramatic political clashes, and is far from being restricted to those whose politics might be termed popular: in fact, politicians opposing one another on a particular issue not infrequently use it

⁸ Such emphasis on names is by no means unique to this legendary account. In a number of prominent Roman families there existed a prohibition on first names (*praenomina*) of disgraced family members (self-imposed in the Republic, prescribed from above under the empire): e.g., Marcus for the Manlii (Livy 6.20.14), Lucius for the Claudii (Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 1–2), Marcus for the Antonii (Plutarch, *Cicero*, 49.6; Dio 51.19.3), Gnaeus for the Calpurnii Pisones (Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.17). See H. Solin, 'Namensgebung und Politik. Zum Namenswechsel und zu besonderen Vornamen römischer Senatoren', *Tyche*, 10, 1995, pp. 185–210.

⁹ Similarly in a shorter version of this episode in the passage that praises Lucius Brutus as the ancestor of Marcus Brutus, the future tyrannicide, Cicero, *Brutus*, 53: 'qui [L. Brutus] collegae suo imperium abrogaverit ut e civitate regalis nominis memoriam tolleret' [Lucius Brutus, who sought to annul the power of his colleague in order to remove from the state the memory of the royal name].

¹⁰ On Roman memory sanctions, see H. I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, Chapel Hill, 2006.

¹¹ Spurius Cassius (485 BCE), Spurius Maelius (439 BCE), and Marcus Manlius Capitolinus (384 BCE): see Flower, *The Art of Forgetting*, pp. 44–51; and A. W. Lintott, 'The Tradition of Violence in the Annals of the Early Roman Republic', *Historia*, 19, 1970, pp. 12–29. On demolition of the houses of the accused, see M. B. Roller, 'Demolished Houses, Monumentality, and Memory in Roman Culture', *Classical Antiquity*, 29, 2010, pp. 117–80.

¹² While it is often used in the context of the public meetings (cf. Achard, *Pratique rhétorique*, pp. 319–20), it is by no means limited to this, as my selection of evidence in this section will demonstrate. See also Martin *L'idée de royauté à Rome*, vol. 2:2, on the opposition of *libertas* (freedom) and *regnum* as deployed by politicians on opposite sides.

against each other. It is an accusation that targets the manner rather than the content of political behavior.

In this chapter, I explore how the terms of this accusation are used in late republican political battles by drawing, as one inevitably must, on the corpus of Cicero. Other voices, both from other texts and from letters preserved within his corpus, will add breadth to the picture. I focus on those people and situations that attracted this accusation and explore what qualities and behaviors triggered it, as well as how the terms of the accusation were used. I will show that the ubiquity and the flexibility of the discourse of kingship, paradoxical though they may seem to us, are in fact symptomatic of invective in the late Republic. In conclusion, I bring this body of material to bear on the accusations of aspiring to kingship leveled against Gaius Julius Caesar, during his lifetime and posthumously, by Cicero and others.

THE POT, THE KETTLE, AND CICERO REX

The degree to which the accusation of kingship, in its various forms, was by the late Republic part of a familiar discourse of invective is reflected in a passage from the *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*, a rhetorical treatise composed in the 80s BCE by an unknown author. Toward the end of the fourth book, which is devoted to style and contains an account of major rhetorical devices illustrated by examples, the author turns his attention to *conformatio*, or personification, which consists in the speaker giving a voice to an absent person or abstract entity. One of the examples is an evocation of Lucius Junius Brutus, presented in the following terms by the putative speaker:

But if now that very Lucius Brutus should come to life and be present here, before your feet, would he not use the following speech? ‘I expelled the kings, you are bringing in tyrants; I procured liberty, which did not then exist, you do not wish to preserve it, though it had been procured; I freed the country at a danger to my own life, you do not care to be free, though no danger threatens.’¹³

The very fact that such an example can be offered as one of two general templates suggests its flexibility. Both sides of any number of contentious and ideologically charged issues can claim defense of freedom as their motivation, as we have seen many times in the political debates of our own times. Rudolph Kröhnert in his 1873

¹³ *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.66: ‘quodsi nunc Lucius ille Brutus revivescat et hic ante pedes vestros adsit, is non hac utatur oratione: “ego reges eieci, vos tyrannos introducitis; ego libertatem, quae non erat, peperī, vos partam servare non vultis; ego capitis mei periculo patriam liberavi, vos liberi sine periculo esse non curatis?”’

dissertation on the treatise—which may be one of the last times anyone has thought about this passage—saw this kind of rhetoric as the preserve of the *populares*, suggesting tribunes of the Marian period as the probable source.¹⁴ This approach, adopted by Harry Caplan in his Loeb edition, seems to me to miss the point: the author of *ad Herennium* clearly feels no need to provide context and expects his readers to be able to imagine situations where such language would be easily applicable, powerful, and virtually expected.

In fact, an example of such tactics used against the *populares* is found in Cicero's speeches *On the Agrarian Law*. Land measures were traditionally associated with popular politics and most commonly originated with the tribunes, as in this case.¹⁵ The bill in question, the *rogatio Servilia*, was proposed by the tribune of the plebs for the year 63 BCE, P. Servilius Rullus, shortly after he took office at the end of the previous year.¹⁶ Cicero delivered his first speech against the bill to the Senate as soon as he assumed the consulship on 1 January 63.¹⁷ Toward the end of the speech, he challenges Rullus' assumption that the people will welcome his land bill and, pointing to the speech that he is about to deliver to the people, casts it as the contest between the consul and the tribunes over the true meaning of the term *popularis*:

You are very much mistaken, Rullus, both you and many of your colleagues, who have hoped to be considered popular in the process of overturning the republic in opposition to a consul who is popular in truth, not in appearance. I challenge you, I call you into the public meeting, I want to appeal to the Roman people as arbiter.¹⁸

At the close of the senatorial speech, among the sources of fear that Cicero promises to remove from the Roman people is the potential for regal rule by the ten commissioners who were to execute the provisions of the law.¹⁹ The proposal to set

¹⁴ The origins of the 'popular' examples in the work are discussed by J. von Ungern-Sternberg, 'Die popularen Beispiele in der Schrift des Auctors ad Herennium', *Chiron*, 3, 1973, pp. 143–62.

¹⁵ On agrarian legislation in the Roman Republic, see D. Gargola, *Lands, Laws, and Gods: Magistrates and Ceremony in the Regulation of Public Lands in Republican Rome*, Chapel Hill, 1995.

¹⁶ The bill is treated in detail by E. S. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, Berkeley, 1995, pp. 389–96.

¹⁷ Of the four speeches that Cicero delivered, the second and the third survive in their entirety; the beginning of the first and the entire fourth speech are lost. The third speech, a response to rumors that Cicero claims were circulated against him after the success of his speech in the assembly, is significantly shorter.

¹⁸ Cic. *Agr.* 1.23: 'errastis, Rulle, vehementer et tu et non nulli conlegae tui qui sperastis vos contra consulem veritate, non ostentatione popularem posse in evertenda re publica populares existimari. lacesso vos, in contionem voco, populo Romano disceptatore uti volo'.

¹⁹ Cic. *Agr.* 1.24: 'nullum regnum decemvirale'.

up this commission of ten, to operate for five years with allegedly unprecedented powers, coupled with the fact that Rullus assigned himself a prominent role at every stage of the law's passage and execution, offered Cicero the opportunity to activate the kingship discourse. This invective forms a prominent part of Cicero's attack on Rullus and his law, and it is essential to his bid to wrest the claim of being truly 'popular' away from the tribune, portraying the bill instead as an attack on the liberty of the Roman people, hard won by their ancestors.²⁰

The very first time that the commissioners are mentioned, they are referred to as 'treasury kings', *reges aerarii* (*Agr.* 2.15). The expression, coined by Cicero, is a play on *tribunus aerarius*, an early office related to disbursement of treasury funds, but by the late Republic simply a census category just below the equestrians. The point of the jibe—in addition to looking ahead to self-serving financial motives that Cicero later attributes to Rullus and the shadowy men who he claims are expecting election as commissioners—is the replacement of *tribunus*, also designating the office that Rullus holds, with *rex*, the word most adverse to the freedom of the people. Cicero makes the opposition explicit in what follows, expressing outrage that a tribune is behind this attempt to set up kings in the state. Evidently, on many occasions when Cicero uses the word *rex* in this manner, he primarily avails himself of the discourse surrounding the expulsion of the Roman kings, even if he also uses the negative Greek term, *tyrannus*, a number of times. When Cicero presents the law as a plot against the freedom of the people, he defines that freedom as won by the sweat and the blood of their ancestors.²¹ He further emphasizes that the people he addresses were the beneficiaries of their ancestors' sacrifice without any effort on their part (*nullo vestro labore*) and offers them his help in defending their freedom. In effect, he is asking them to find inspiration in the struggle against the Tarquins and imitate their ancestors, while offering himself up as a latter-day Brutus.

Cicero employs the same opposition between tribune and king in another speech from the same year, this time in defense of the elderly senator Gaius Rabirius on the charge of high treason for the murder of the tribune Lucius Saturninus in the year 100. The rather archaic charge, *perduellio*, entailed an equally archaic punishment,

²⁰ The discourse is by no means limited to contests with popular politicians. Cicero also uses it when he himself is taking a more popular line against the senatorial establishment: in the last of the speeches he published against the corrupt governor Gaius Verres in 70, Cicero attacks the power of the Senate in the courts and more generally following Sulla's reforms as royal ('regiam istam vestram dominationem') before the restoration of the office of the tribune of the plebs (*Vér.* 5.175). He assails the censors in similar terms in the defense speech for Aulus Cluentius in 66, as he cautions his audience against allowing them royal power over any of the citizens in the future ('in unum quemque nostrum censoribus in posterum potestatem regiam permittatis', *Cluent.* 123).

²¹ *Cic. Agr.* 2.16: 'insidias . . . libertati vestrae, plurimo sudore et sanguine maiorum vestrorum partam vobisque traditam libertatem'.

crucifixion. Cicero was able to reduce the penalty to the more customary exile but uses the disproportionate cruelty of the charge to accuse the tribune Titus Labienus, who prosecuted Rabirius, of kinglike behavior:

For this reason I confess, Labienus, and even acknowledge freely and display for all to see that it was through my counsel, virtue, and authority that you were driven away from that action, cruel, improper, fitting not for a tribune, but for a king.²²

This is a highly rhetorical sentence,²³ and it is no coincidence that Cicero chooses to express the idea of preventing Labienus from proceeding with the original punishment with the verb *depello*, that, following *regia*, cannot but bring into play *expello*, the standard verb to designate the expulsion of the kings. The association is all the more easily established since Cicero has already drawn an explicit connection between Labienus and not just any king, but ‘Tarquin, the most proud and the most cruel king,’ in the preceding part of the speech, where he referred to the archaic formula accompanying the obsolete punishment and opposed his actions to his posture as a *popularis*.²⁴ Thus, if Labienus is acting like a king, Cicero is, once again, proposing to play the role of Brutus, restoring *libertas* to the people whose rights are outraged by the threat to Rabirius.

But in the case of the agrarian law, what are the provisions that allow Cicero to depict it as autocratic and directed against the people? The first is the limitation of the number of tribes involved in the election of the commissioners to seventeen, as opposed to the usual thirty-five, selected by lot right before the election. Cicero interprets this provision as an assault on the people’s voting rights, a cornerstone of their freedom.²⁵ Next, Cicero presents the length of the term that the commissioners would serve—five years—as unprecedented and repeatedly describes the powers

²² Cic. *Rab. Perd.* 17: ‘quam ob rem fateor atque etiam, Labiene, profiteor et prae me fero te ex illa crudeli, importuna, non tribunicia actione sed regia, meo consilio, virtute, auctoritate esse depulsum’; cf. 10 on the expulsion from Rome of cruelty against the free people along with the kings.

²³ It contains three tricola (units of three parallel elements) and culminates in one of Cicero’s favorite rhythmical endings, a clausula consisting of a cretic and a spondee.

²⁴ *Rab. Perd.* 13: ‘namque haec tua, quae te, hominem clementem popularemque, delectant, “I, lictor, conliga manus” non modo huius libertatis mansuetudinisque non sunt sed ne Romuli quidem aut Numae Pompili; Tarquini, superbissimi atque crudelissimi regis, ista sunt cruciatus carmina quae tu, homo lenis ac popularis, libentissime commemoras’ [for these words that delight you, a merciful man who favors the people: ‘Go, lictor, bind his hands’, do not suit not only this freedom and clemency, but not even Romulus or Numa Pompilius; these incantations that you, a mild man who favors the people recall with such pleasure belong to the tortures of Tarquin, the most proud and most cruel king].

²⁵ One effect of such a procedure would be to virtually eliminate the possibility of bribery; cf. Gruen, *Last Generation*, p. 390.

assigned to their office as unlimited and royal,²⁶ claiming that no one who enjoys kingly power for five years will give it up without a fight; therefore, the commission is in effect perpetual (*Agr.* 2.32). Finally, Cicero portrays the provision for settling new colonies within Italy as a sinister plan for military occupation to form the foundation of *regnum* (*Agr.* 2.75) and further accuses Rullus and his allies of aiming to set up an alternate state with a center in Capua, an erstwhile competitor and a treacherous ally (*Agr.* 2.89 and 98).

His other main target is Rullus himself. Rullus would hold the assembly electing the commissioners, draw the lots for the seventeen participating tribes, and was himself eligible for election. This concentration of functions in his hands opens him up to accusations of cupidity and despotic behavior. Cicero says that not even the man's own slaves would accept such terms: so much less should the Roman people, here referred to as *gentium domini*, masters of the world (*Agr.* 2.22). Finally, Cicero claims that the personal motivation for the entire bill is Rullus' desire to help his father-in-law, who acquired lands through Sullan proscriptions, to unload them at profit.²⁷

Cicero's rhetoric in this speech has been criticized as unscrupulous and misleading,²⁸ but it is unlikely to have caused surprise among his contemporaries and, more importantly, it appears to have been effective. The bill, intended to provide new land for the Roman poor, was vetoed by another tribune and faded away because the consul had been able to use the discourse of kingship persuasively and aroused sufficient fears that in formulating the provisions of the law Rullus had indeed overreached: acted, and planned to act, in an autocratic, kingly manner.

Given the elasticity of the discourse, it was only to be expected that Cicero himself would eventually become its target. In fact, it was Cicero's actions as consul in the same year that exposed him to the accusation of behaving like a king. His aggressive suppression of the Catilinarian conspiracy culminated in the execution of the conspirators arrested in Rome without trial and popular approval, albeit with the support of the senatorial majority. An unprecedented action, it was crucial in weakening Cicero's position in the years between his consulship and his exile in 58 at the instigation of Publius Clodius Pulcher, backed by Pompey and Caesar. Particularly important for our understanding of the discourse under investigation

²⁶ E.g.: *reges aerarii* (2.15), *regia potestas* (2.20); 'dat praeterea potestatem verbo praetoriam, re vera regiam; definit in quinquennium, facit sempiternam' (2.32); 'verbum mihi deest, Quirites, cum ego hanc potestatem regiam appello, sed profecto maior est quaedam' (2.35).

²⁷ Cic. *Agr.* 2.69 and treated at greater length in *Agr.* 3, in response to rumors that Cicero himself was on the side of the Sullan profiteers in opposing the bill.

²⁸ Gruen, *Last Generation*, p. 394; P. A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays*, Oxford/New York, 1988, p. 251.

here is the fact that the accusation of kingly, autocratic behavior was not only leveled at Cicero but also turned by Cicero himself against his accusers, Clodius included.

A good example of this dynamic is found in the speech *On Behalf of Sulla*.²⁹ In 62, P. Cornelius Sulla, the nephew of the dictator, was prosecuted by his long-time political opponent, the younger L. Manlius Torquatus, for political violence in connection with his alleged association with Catiline. Cicero, who had testified against a number of Catiline's associates earlier in the year, spoke for the defense, despite his close connection to the Torquati. Torquatus in his speech assailed Cicero personally, accusing him, among other things, of violating their friendship by taking up Sulla's defense. But a key part of his strategy was an attack on Cicero, in light of his recent actions, as a *rex peregrinus*, a foreign king.³⁰ Once again, the main source of the discourse that Torquatus here uses against Cicero is not primarily Hellenistic but originates in the Roman past, as he labels Cicero the third foreign king to lord it over Rome, after Numa and Tarquinius Priscus (*Sul.* 22). The feature of kingship that Torquatus must have emphasized in his speech is excessive power exercised with cruelty, and Cicero, in turn, responds by framing his willingness to come to Sulla's defense as an expression of benevolence and kindness. Furthermore, he redirects the accusation of *regnum* by, first, attaching the opprobrious name to the regime that Catiline would have instituted, had the conspiracy been successful (*Sul.* 21); second, by offering a philosophically based definition of 'kingly,' which he is willing to have applied to himself, as not being a slave to any man or any desire (*Sul.* 25); and finally by turning the charge against Torquatus himself for attempting to circumscribe Cicero's speech (*Sul.* 48), while depicting himself as a defender of *libertas*.

Torquatus was not the only one to call Cicero *rex*, nor was Cicero's use of this type of invective limited to contexts of self-defense. In his attack on Catiline and his allies, he applied the term to P. Cornelius Lentulus Sura, a prominent member of the conspiracy rumored to have been bolstered in his hopes by a prophecy that he would be the third Cornelius—following Sulla and Cinna—to reign in Rome (*Cat.* 3.8, cf. 4.12). He also invoked kingship in discussing the conspirators more generally, imagining royal power as the pinnacle of their hopes (*Cat.* 2.19). The same rumor about Lentulus is reported in the account of the conspiracy by Sallust, who specifies that the prophecy originated from the Sibylline books (*Cat.* 47). Sallust also explicitly accuses Catiline himself of aiming at *regnum* following Sulla's example, a charge that Cicero made only later (*Cat.* 5).

This kind of rhetoric is not simply a ploy used in public contexts but is more deeply reflective of the ways in which such actions and behaviors were conceptualized and

²⁹ For more on this speech, see D. H. Berry, *Cicero. Pro P. Sulla Oratio*, Cambridge/New York, 1996.

³⁰ *Peregrinus* alludes to Cicero's hometown of Arpinum, a municipality that had full Roman citizenship since 188

classified. This can be seen from Cicero's letters, where he uses similar language, most notably when reporting to Atticus the news of Clodius' adoption into a plebeian family, supported by Pompey and facilitated by Caesar in his role as *pontifex maximus*: 'here indeed is autocracy and in no way can it be endured.'³¹ And Clodius himself, in his attempts to have Cicero exiled and banish his memory from the city, relied, at least in part, on the same discourse: he called Cicero *rex* during an interchange in the Senate in 61³² and again when, after Cicero's exile, he demolished the latter's house on the Palatine and in its place established a shrine to Liberty, the very thing the kings' expulsion first secured for the Roman people.³³ Not surprisingly, Cicero later turned this rhetoric against Clodius: in the speech defending Milo, on trial for killing Clodius in a street fight that capped the urban violence perpetrated by the supporters of both men, he suggested that the lawless and violent Clodius was hoping to reign in Rome, if only he could get Milo out of the way (*Mil.* 43).

CONSUL, DICTATOR, KING?

Another notable feature of Cicero's application of *regnum* and related terms is that, looking back at the recent past, he identifies figures responsible for large-scale disturbances as autocratic without regard to their ideological motivations. Thus, in one of his post-exile speeches he couples the opponents Sulla and Cinna as examples of men who had held 'royal' power (*Har.* 54) and later has a speaker in a philosophical dialogue apply the same label to Tiberius Gracchus (*Amic.* 41), the very man he strategically praises at the opening of his second speech on the agrarian law (*Agr.* 2.10). This disregard for the ideological leanings of historical figures who become the targets of the kingship discourse is particularly relevant as we move to consider the period of the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, as well as Caesar's dictatorship and its immediate aftermath. Given the flexibility of the discourse encountered in the previous section, it is not surprising that, in his correspondence with Atticus, Cicero routinely accuses both Caesar and Pompey of aiming at kingly power.³⁴

³¹ Cic. *Att.* 2.12.1 (SB 30): 'hoc vero regnum est et ferri nullo pacto potest'.

³² Cic. *Att.* 1.16.10 (SB 16): 'quousque . . . hunc regem feremus?' Cicero responded with a pun on the name of Clodius' brother-in-law, Q. Marcius Rex; see Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter*, pp. 83–4.

³³ See A. Clark, *Divine Qualities: Cult and Community in Republican Rome*, Oxford/New York, 2007, pp. 209–20; and Roller, 'Demolished Houses', pp. 133–7; on the concept of *libertas*, see C. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea in Rome during the Late Republic and Early Principate*, Cambridge, 1950; and Brunt, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, ch. 6. I regret not having been able to take into account V. Arena, *Libertas and the Practice of Politics in the Late Roman Republic*, Cambridge, 2012.

³⁴ Cic. *Att.* 8.11.2 (SB 161): 'uterque regnare vult' [each one wants to rule as king]; *Att.* 10.7.1 (SB 198): 'regnandi

Pompey, in particular, is regularly associated with the *regnum* of Sulla, whose protégé he had been.³⁵

As we move from the civil war era to Caesar's uncontested rule, there is a marked difference in the impact that the kingship discourse has had on the interpretation of historical events and, especially, Caesar's intentions. While the earlier material has not been studied systematically before, no one who encountered it would consider it evidence for the intentions of Cicero, Clodius, Catiline, or, for that matter, of Sulla, Cinna, Gracchus, or Pompey. Similarly, following Caesar's death, when the same rhetoric is directed by Cicero and others against Mark Antony as Caesar's putative successor, it is never taken to be an indication of Antony's actual intentions. Yet, in the case of Caesar, because of the unique position that he did in fact occupy as *dictator perpetuus*, because of the difficulty of discerning his intentions and plans, cut off by assassination, and, in no small part, because of the retrospective designation of Caesar as the first emperor, we have a peculiar situation where the rhetoric matches the judgment of historians.³⁶ This is not the place for full-scale reassessment of the evidence for Caesar's plans. Nor can I here treat the related strand of the discourse of autocracy, connected with Hellenistic monarchy, that also plays an important part in the events and their interpretation and has received considerable scholarly attention.³⁷ In this section I wish only to highlight the extent to which much of the invective against Caesar, which lies behind many of our sources,³⁸ is a

Romani deleatur necesse est, sin autem vincit, Sullano more exemploque vincet' [this is a fight for royal power, in which the more moderate and morally upright king has been driven out, and, if he does not win, the name of the Roman people will inevitably be destroyed, but if he does win, he will win following Sulla's example and custom]; Caesar accused of using honor as pretext to *regnum* and tyranny (the latter in a quotation from Euripides' *Phoenissae*): *Att.* 7.11.1 (SB 134); his future rule as *regnum* not to be endured even by a Persian, *Att.* 10.8.2 (SB 199); cf. Gildenhard 'Reckoning with Tyranny'.

³⁵ Cic. *Att.* 9.7.3 (SB 174): 'mirandum enim in modum Gnaeus noster Sullani regni similitudinem concupivit' [for in a wondrous way our Gnaeus has lusted after a likeness of Sulla's reign]; cf. *Att.* 8.11.2 (SB 161) and *Att.* 10.7.1 (SB 198), quoted in the preceding note.

³⁶ For a survey of prior scholarship on Caesar's intentions, see Z. Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and His Public Image*, London, 1983, ch. 1. The strand in the scholarship that sees Caesar as aiming at monarchy, though powerful, is by no means universal, and many have seen in Caesar's repeated rejections of the title that he realized that it was pointless at best; see, e.g., Rawson, 'Caesar's Heritage'; and L. Canfora, *Julius Caesar: The Life and Times of the People's Dictator*, Berkeley, 1999, chs 30–31. C. Meier, *Caesar: A Biography*, New York, 1997, leaves the question largely open, stating at one point that if Caesar had a solution in mind it had to be monarchy (470) and at another that he did not most likely want the title (475); Yavetz, *Julius Caesar*, ch. 6, finds the evidence on the issue insufficient for a clear answer.

³⁷ See n. 1.

³⁸ Some of the sources hostile to Caesar that underlie our later sources are Pompeian, such as Titus Ampius Balbus (Suet. *Caes.* 77 identifies him as a source for Caesar's sayings that are among the evidence used for his autocratic aspirations).

direct continuation of the earlier discourse of kingship: as such, it serves the ends of those who deploy it, rather than reflecting Caesar's actual intentions, or even their perception by his contemporaries.

It is significant that, following the civil war and before the assassination, Cicero almost never refers to Caesar as king. Two of the four instances are indirect, describing comparanda for Cicero's situation;³⁹ another is a reference to Caesar's games in 45 as royal, *regia munera*.⁴⁰ The only direct reference to Caesar himself as *rex* is in a letter reporting to Atticus their nephew's allegations that Cicero and his brother were estranged from Caesar and untrustworthy, together with a warning to Caesar to beware Cicero in particular. In a parenthetical remark, Cicero tells Atticus that all this is no cause for concern: 'this would be a reason to fear if I didn't see that the king knows that I have no spirit'.⁴¹ Here the reference is to Caesar's unlimited power and Cicero's corresponding debased condition, but it belongs to the same realm as the earlier invective and is in no way indicative of Cicero's perception of Caesar's intentions.

But the portrayal of Caesar as king plays a crucial part in the period leading up to his assassination. Caesar's own uncertain and often ambiguous behavior as he seemed to be looking for a way to stabilize his position so that his reforms would endure without him, laid him open to the charge. But the charge itself, made anonymously, allowed his opponents to use familiar invective to shape a narrative in which he sought the diadem, while at the same time attempting to oblige Marcus Brutus to take up the part of his namesake who put an end to monarchy at Rome. Suetonius in his *Life of the Deified Julius* reports two instances of graffiti that appeared in prominent public spaces, a venerable popular Roman tradition. The first was on the statue of Lucius Junius Brutus and read: 'if only you were living';⁴² Plutarch records two graffiti with the same meaning and adds that corresponding messages appeared on the praetorian tribunal of Marcus Brutus: 'Brutus, you are

³⁹ Cic., *Fam.* 9.16.6 (SB 190): in a philosophically colored letter to Papirius Paetus, Cicero invokes as a parallel how the wise men of Greece endured their enslaved condition in *regna*; *Att.* 13.28.2 (SB 299): in describing his inability to compose a philosophical letter of advice to Caesar, Cicero invokes the model of Aristotle's letter to Alexander and reminds Atticus of the latter's cruel and arrogant behavior once he was declared *rex*.

⁴⁰ Cic. *Fam.* 6.19.2 (SB 262). Pace J. F. Gardner, 'The Dictator', in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. M. T. Griffin, Malden, MA, 2009, pp. 57–71, who interprets this reference as part of Cicero's attribution to Caesar of a long-standing and well worked-out plan for absolute power (60).

⁴¹ Cic. *Att.* 13.37.2 (SB 346): 'φοβερὸν ἂν ἦν nisi viderem scire regem me animi nihil habere'.

⁴² Suet. *Jul.* 80: 'utinam viveres'.

sleeping' and 'you are not truly a Brutus'.⁴³ The second graffito was on the statue of Caesar himself:

Brutus, because he drove out the kings, was made the first consul:
this one, because he drove out the consuls, was afterward made king.⁴⁴

This statue's placement among those of founder figures on the Capitoline Hill, an area that combined effigies of the early kings with that of Lucius Junius Brutus, was rife with ambiguity exploited in the graffito: on the Capitoline, Caesar is simultaneously aligned with Romulus, the founding king, and Brutus the liberator.⁴⁵ Building on the visual impact of the statue's location, the graffito invites the viewer to see Caesar as part of the group of kings, a stand-in for the absent Tarquins and an opponent of Brutus. Thus, in the facile equivalence that the graffiti draw between Caesar and the Tarquins on the one hand and the two Bruti on the other, we can see that the discourse of kingship as it was used in late republican invective provided the anonymous graffiti writers with both the most relevant reference point and the most powerful weapon.

A number of incidents contributed to the formation of the narrative,⁴⁶ and none more than the infamous Lupercalia episode, where Antony offered Caesar the diadem.⁴⁷ All these events seem to have been staged, but the status of each is ambiguous. It is impossible to know for sure whether they were orchestrated by Caesar's opponents to incite more anger against his alleged plans or by Caesar and his well-wishers to give him an opportunity to refute the accusations. Caesar's growing impatience and irritation with being forced into the narrative are responsible for outbursts of anger and miscalculations that only added to the overall impression of increasing despotism that his opponents were trying to create.

The assassination itself is crucial in the retrospective application of the label *rex* to Caesar. The uncertain political standing of the assassins and their allies following Antony's successful rousing of popular wrath against them depended absolutely

⁴³ Plut. *Brut.* 9: 'Βρούτε καθεύδεις'; 'ὄνκ εἰ Βρούτος ἀληθῶς'; also reported by Dio 44.12 (who also mentions people calling out to Brutus in the streets, 'We need a Brutus', and the distribution of pamphlets denying the connection between him and his alleged ancestor) and Appian *BC* 2.112, who reports further variants of the graffiti.

⁴⁴ Suet. *Jul.* 80: 'Brutus, quia reges eiecit, consul primus factus est:/hic, quia consules eiecit, rex postremo factus est.'

⁴⁵ See M. Cadario 'Le statue di Cesare a Roma tra il 46 e il 44 a.C.', *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano*, 59:3, 2006, pp. 38–41.

⁴⁶ Among the many ambiguous honors and dedications, rumors and remarks, of particular importance in our sources are Caesar's failure to rise to greet the Senate (Suet. *Jul.* 78; Livy, *Periochae*, 116; Dio 44.8.2; Plutarch, *Caesar*, 60.3–4; Appian, *Civil Wars*, 2.107; Nicolaus of Damascus, *Life of Augustus*, 22); his altercation with the tribune Pontius Aquila, who did not rise from his seat as Caesar passed by during a triumph (Suet. *Jul.* 78), and his reprimand of the tribunes who had removed a royal fillet from his statue (Suet. *Jul.* 79; Dio 44.9–10; App. *BC* 2.108; Plut. *Caes.* 61.4–5).

⁴⁷ Cic. *Phil.* 2. 84–7; Suet. *Jul.* 79; Liv. *Per.* 116; Plut. *Caes.* 61.3–4 and *Ant.* 12.1; Dio 44.11.2–3 and 46. 19.4; App.

on their ability to present themselves as tyrannicides, as liberators of the Roman people who continued not only the Greek tradition exemplified by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the iconic Athenian tyrant-slayers, but especially the Roman tradition that originated with L. Junius Brutus, whom Marcus Brutus counted among his ancestors.⁴⁸ Their need to be seen as disinterested defenders of the people's freedom hinged on the portrayal of Caesar as a king in the making, just as in opposing Antony they had to depict the latter as carrying forward Caesar's autocratic plans. Cicero, whose name Brutus called out when he raised his bloody dagger,⁴⁹ was an active proponent of this portrayal.

One perhaps unexpected place where the urgency of these concerns can be seen is the correspondence between Cicero and Gaius Matius. It was reported to Cicero that Matius, who had been close to both Cicero and Caesar, was grieving over the death of his friend. Cicero publicly expressed disapproval, prompting Matius to complain to a mutual friend, C. Trebatius Testa. Cicero responded with a letter in which he worked hard to preserve his friendship with Matius,⁵⁰ yet tried to justify his original disapproval. We also have Matius' response. In the wide-ranging and deeply serious dispute over the meaning of friendship and its relationship to loyalty to the state that the exchange constitutes, the charge of kingship leveled against Caesar is an essential weapon in Cicero's arsenal. If Caesar was in fact *rex*, then Cicero's disapproval of Matius' grief is validated. It is not, then, surprising that here we find one of the strongest examples of Cicero's use of the claim. He devotes as little space as he can in this fairly long letter to the major issue of Matius' continuing loyalty to Caesar's memory, and he distances himself from the disapproval of his friend's grief by assigning it to others:

But you, a man of great learning, must realize that, if Caesar was a king—and that is certainly my own opinion—, it is possible to debate your duty in this case and follow either of two opinions, either the one that is usually my own, that your loyalty and compassion are to be praised, since you love your friend even after death, or the other, which is held by very many men, that one must put the freedom of the country before the life of a friend.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Cicero advertised this aspect of Brutus' ancestry in the *Brutus* passage quoted in n. 2, and Atticus drew up a genealogical chart for his younger friend (Nepos, *Atticus*, 18).

⁴⁹ Cic. *Phil.* 2.28.

⁵⁰ For Cicero's development of the conventions of politeness and friendship in this letter, see J. Hall, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero's Letters*, Oxford/New York, 2009, pp. 60–66.

⁵¹ Cic. *Fam.* 11.27.8 (SB 348): 'sed te, hominem doctissimum, non fugit, si Caesar rex fuerit—quod mihi quidem videtur—, in utramque partem de tuo officio disputari posse, vel in eam, qua ego soleo uti, laudandam esse fidem et humanitatem tuam, qui amicum etiam mortuum diligas, vel in eam, qua nonnulli utuntur, libertatem

It is not difficult to discern Cicero's actual opinion, despite tactful relocation of the source of criticism. The first line of argument, which he assigns to himself, does not face the problem of the tension between loyalty and state interest. Where Cicero stands when the two are considered as opposing forces is revealed by his emphatic assertion, following the conditional, that Caesar was in fact king. The true weight of this small portion of the letter is reflected in the fact that Matius, while preserving the polite fiction that the charges against him are made by others, replies to them in a letter to Cicero (*Fam.* 11.28; SB 349) and devotes most of that letter to the defense of his friendship with Caesar and his right to his grief. As we look back at the Cicero passage in this light, then, it is clear that he felt that activating the discourse of kingship in its strongest form was the only argument necessary to condemn Matius and to defend that condemnation.

But in the public sphere, the discourse of kingship and liberation was everywhere after the assassination. It permeates Cicero's *Philippics*, in his discussions of both the Caesarian past and Antony's new position.⁵² Cicero's deployment here goes in a number of directions. One is similar to the letter to Matius and amounts to an attempt to quash any sympathy for Caesar by equating it with approval of his 'royal' power: 'is there anyone therefore, except for those who rejoiced in his reign, who either did not wish for it [the assassination] to happen or disapproved once it was done?'⁵³ Another aligns Caesar with other figures associated with *regnum*. In that masterpiece of tendentious vitriol, the *Second Philippic*, Cicero creates several mini-genealogies of regal power in the Republic, with Caesar as their climax. Thus Sulla and Cinna, explicitly associated with *regnum* in other contexts, are downgraded to *potentia* and *dominatio* here so that only Caesar is marked as actually wielding royal power (*Phil.* 2.108). Another list presents a different kind of escalation: Tarquin, a king expelled and confronted in a military conflict, and the group of three men, Spurius Cassius, Spurius Maelius, and Marcus Manlius, accused of aiming at *regnum* and killed,⁵⁴ provide a background for the statement that the liberators were the first in Roman history to attack and kill a man who actually held regal power (*Phil.* 2.114).⁵⁵

⁵² Antony is accused of benefiting from Caesar's death by, among other things, obtaining kingly power: 'non modo non servis, sed etiam regnas' (*Phil.* 2.35); cf. *Phil.* 3.9, 8.12.

⁵³ Cic. *Phil.* 2. 29: 'ecquis est igitur exceptis iis, qui illum regnare gaudebant, qui illud aut fieri noluerit aut factum improbat?'

⁵⁴ See n. 5.

⁵⁵ This also explains why both Greek and Roman strands of anti-monarchical rhetoric were necessary to the assassins' self-justification. They are tyrannicides, rather than regicides, because no one had ever killed a king in Rome.

Similar rhetoric is also ever-present in Cicero's characterization of the 'liberators', both in speeches and in letters to a variety of correspondents, and in the exchanges with Brutus and Cassius themselves, as well as their own correspondence with Antony. One form it takes is an attack simultaneously against Caesar's past position and, more important, against Antony's consolidation of his position as the leader of the Caesarians. Over and over again, Cicero formulates the problem with the conspiracy and its execution as having removed the king, but leaving kingly power itself, *regnum*, intact, and exhorts the assassins to finish the task.⁵⁶ Brutus and Cassius, in a joint letter, threaten Antony with the fate that befell Caesar the king: 'make sure you consider not how long Caesar lived, but how not long he held kingly power.'⁵⁷ Yet Antony himself also attempted to benefit from this discourse. In putting forward the motion to ban the name *dictator*, a move that receives much praise from Cicero in the first *Philippic*, he was trying to compete with Marcus Brutus and position himself as a true descendant of Lucius Brutus, whose removal of the name of the royal family was the starting point of my discussion.⁵⁸

Finally, this discourse plays an important role in the philosophical framing of Caesar's rule and assassination in Cicero's post-Caesarian philosophical works, especially his last, *On Duties*. In the final book of this treatise, devoted to formulating the relationship between what is honorable, *honestum*, and what is beneficial, *utile*, Cicero argues that the two qualities cannot be separated. His examples culminate in a discussion of a man who wanted to, and did in fact, become king.⁵⁹ That such a man cannot be seen as honorable he considers self-evident, and he goes on to deny the opinion, common among the ordinary folk, that kingship is the most beneficial thing for an individual. He argues against this assessment, calling a king's life full of fear and base in its very nature. He does not mention Caesar by name, but the reference is certainly clear enough. And Cicero leaves unsaid the concluding argument against the benefits of kingship: Caesar's assassination.

⁵⁶ *Fam.* 11.8.1, 11.5.3, *ad Brut.* 2.5.1 to Brutus; *Fam.* 12.1.1 to Cassius; *ad Brut.* 1.4a Brutus to Cicero; *Phil.* 2.34; cf. *Att.* 4.11.1.

⁵⁷ *Cic. Fam.* 11.3: 'neque quamdiu vixerit Caesar, sed, quam non diu regnarit, fac cogites'.

⁵⁸ *Phil.* 1.3–4 and 32. Cicero says that Caesar's *dictatura* was in effect royal power (3) and compares the removal of the name *dictator* to the prohibition on the name Marcus in the *gens Manlia* because of the crime of M. Manlius Capitolinus (32).

⁵⁹ *Cic. Off.* 3.83: 'qui rex populi Romani dominusque omnium gentium esse concupiverit idque perfecerit'. Similarly, when he reports the Sibylline oracle allegedly predicting that the Parthians could only be conquered by a king, Cicero remarks that Caesar was already king in fact, but the oracle was used to push for the title (*Div.* 2.110).

CONCLUSION

A key feature of the discourse of kingship as practiced in the late Republic is its malleability. It is precisely the fact that it can be used against targets ranging from censors to tribunes, and easily turned back on the accuser by the accused, that made it such a convenient political and rhetorical tool. In any situation where a skilled speaker saw a plausible case of overreaching, invective based on kingly behavior was readily available and virtually expected, as the textbook example in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* indicates. Cicero used it with equal success against a tribune who proposed agrarian legislation and against the senatorial elite that threw its power behind the corrupt governor Verres. It is readily apparent that the rhetoric used against Julius Caesar in the last years of his life and after his death, rhetoric that underlies later attacks against Roman emperors and their successors, derives from the same source. Why, then, has it been so much more successful, both in inspiring the conspiracy to assassinate him and in shaping modern interpretations of his intentions? The crucial difference must lie in the unique position that Caesar the dictator did in fact occupy after the civil war. For while Caesar repeatedly denied the name *rex*, he could never succeed in dispelling the power of the invective used against him simply because he could never plausibly turn the accusation against his accusers. And he who cannot dissociate himself from the discourse of kingship must become its victim.

Imperial Madness in Ancient Rome

*Aloys Winterling**

CALIGULA, RULER OF the Roman Empire from 37 to 41 CE, once fell gravely ill. Two Roman citizens expressed their willingness to offer their lives or to fight as gladiators if the emperor should regain his health. When Caligula did indeed recover shortly thereafter, he insisted that the two citizens fulfill their promises. Both died. His behavior in other areas was no less bizarre: he entertained incestuous relations with his sisters, wanted to make his horse consul, and claimed to have personal conversations with the Moon goddess.

Nero, emperor from 54 to 68 CE, is reported to have considered himself a supremely gifted artist. He sang, played the harp, composed poetry, and competed in chariot races. He appeared onstage and in the arena and even went on tour in Greece. In Rome, he exploited the empire's vast wealth to put on enormous feasts in the city's public spaces and to build a palace complex that linked the Palatine and Esquiline, taking up approximately fifty hectares of space.

Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96 CE, is said to have deliberately terrorized the Roman aristocracy and enforced their regular attendance at his morning receptions and at evening feasts in his palace. Near the end of his reign, he became so afraid of conspiracies that he installed mirrors on the palace walls in order always to see what went on behind his back.

* This chapter is a revised version of an article that first appeared in *Jahrbuch des Historischen Kollegs* 2007, Munich, 2008, pp. 115–39. It was translated from German by Thomas M. Miller. For the current state of scholarship, see *Zwischen Strukturgeschichte und Biographie. Probleme und Perspektiven einer neuen Römischen Kaiserergeschichte*. 31 v. Chr.–192 n. Chr., ed. A. Winterling, Munich, 2011.

Caligula, Nero, Domitian—as far as the first century of our era goes, it is these three men who supply the image of the bad Roman emperor par excellence in the ancient literary tradition. The sources cite as their common characteristics pride, hatred, persecution of the senatorial aristocracy, luxurious extravagance, cruelty, sexual perversion, megalomania, and—to various degrees depending on the emperor—indications of mental illness. All three were either murdered or, in Nero's case, forced to commit suicide. After their deaths, the Senate erased them from public memory, in a procedure known as *damnatio memoriae*, and held their actions to have been legally invalid. It was above all these emperors—along with Commodus (r. 180–192 CE) and Heliogabalus (r. 218–222 CE)—who rendered plausible the modern concept of 'imperial madness'. Originating in the nineteenth century, the idea was applied to contemporary rulers and has since continued to be used in various nonscholarly contexts. It has become a label for those in power who have lost all contact with reality as a result of their position.

Nonetheless, scholars who study Rome's 'mad emperors' have long been aware that the representation of these emperors in ancient sources is not only notoriously unreliable but in places demonstrably false. A good example of the latter is Caligula's alleged incestuous relations with his sisters. The two contemporary sources that we have at our disposal here, Seneca and Philo of Alexandria, make no mention of incest, although both authors moved in aristocratic and court circles at Rome and doubtless would have known about it, had it happened. Since their descriptions manifest an open hatred for Caligula, they would hardly have missed this opportunity to discredit him. Tacitus, writing his *Annals* more than six decades later at the beginning of the second century, went so far as to claim that Agrippina, the sister of Caligula and the wife of the emperor Claudius, attempted to commit incest with her own son, the young emperor Nero—in addition to other accusations of adultery.¹ But of incest with her brother, which would have fit in perfectly well, Tacitus says nothing. Only in Suetonius' biography of Caligula, written several years after Tacitus, do we hear about the emperor's sexual violations of his three sisters.²

It seems likely that such defamatory traditions originated in secret invectives written during the lifetime of the emperors and published shortly after their deaths.³ Although these stories would have seemed untrustworthy to contemporaries as well

¹ Tac. *Ann.* 14.2.

² Suet. *Cal.* 24.

³ The *Apocolocyntosis* attributed to Seneca, targeting the late emperor Claudius, would be an example of this kind of text.

as to historians with a serious concern for truth, they were obviously taken seriously by later authors and thus further propagated. Tacitus describes the difficulties with the sources available to him for the four successors of Augustus: 'The deeds of Tiberius and Gaius (Caligula), as of Claudius and Nero, were falsified out of fear, while they themselves were in power and recorded with fresh hatred after they were dead.'⁴ Like Pliny the Younger, Tacitus himself displays less impartiality than open hostility toward his contemporary Domitian—despite his claim to write *sine ira et studio*.

What does the nature of the sources mean for modern historians? The reports of abnormal behavior attributed to the 'mad emperors' are not reliable. Although they cannot be disproven in every case, the burden of proof is on the other side: given the tendentious character of the sources, one must show that each individual charge is at least plausible, a task which the nature of the evidence often all but precludes. So is all investigation of 'imperial madness' in ancient Rome doomed from the start? I think not. One must simply pose the further question: What lies behind it?

Almost all extant reports about the emperors in question come from authors who belonged to the senatorial or equestrian orders, and the now unknown composers of the defamatory tracts written with 'fresh hatred' doubtless did as well. These were aristocrats, who were in regular direct contact with the emperor and whose fates were directly affected by his behavior, his favor, or his persecution. The defamatory descriptions of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian can therefore in no way be taken literally. And yet, precisely on account of their origins, they provide first-class and valuable testimony to the fundamental conflicts between these emperors and the upper layers of the aristocracy.

Since the sources are themselves part of the problem that they purport neutrally to describe, a somewhat more complex methodology is required for my investigation in this chapter:

1. The question concerning 'imperial madness' must be divided into two subquestions: (a) What was peculiar about the actions of these emperors that led to conflict with the aristocracy and incited the latter's intense hatred? (b) Are peculiar features of these actions to be traced to psychopathic symptoms, that is, to imperial madness?
2. Neither question can be answered through a direct evaluation of the sources; in both cases a structural-historical analysis is needed as a first step. This is the only way to develop criteria of evaluation that make it possible, as a second step, to

⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.

define the plausibility of the reports concerning each emperor. Structural analyses must rely mainly on the same literary sources, but this is no real objection, since the investigation of structures can be based on remarks *en passant*—remarks, that is, that reveal what these writers considered self-evident and that remain untouched by their intended message, or indeed are presupposed by it. Only against this background can we attempt to recontextualize the behavior of each emperor.

STATE OF RESEARCH

In constructing linear historical and biographical narratives for the emperors who are described as mad, there has been a tendency either to follow the judgments of the ancient writers in a more or less qualified form or to attempt to ‘rescue’ the emperors by criticizing the sources as ‘biased’ or by turning their statements into the opposite.⁵ In neither case is sufficient allowance made for the fundamentally defamatory character of the sources: in the first case, their statements are ultimately taken at face value; in the second, the defamation as such and the conflicts that underlie it are not taken into serious consideration.

Until quite recently, scholars working from a structural-historical perspective believed that they could disregard the problem.⁶ From the nineteenth century on, historians analyzing the emperor’s role within the framework of the Roman ‘state,’ as well as those taking a cultural or sociohistorical approach, either trivialized the problem of ‘mad’ emperors through derisive moralizing (‘incompetence’) or simply ignored it. Their refusal to deal with emperors like Caligula, Nero, or Domitian eventually became an obvious weak point, testament to the insufficient complexity of structural-historical approaches to the Roman Empire.

Two approaches to ‘imperial madness’ that have attracted little attention in ‘mainstream’ ancient history have nonetheless left their mark on the concept. One strand belongs to the history of medicine, the other to political anthropology. The first approach was Friedrich Wiedemeister’s (1875): armed with the psychopathological theories of the time, he diagnosed the emperors from a distance and attempted to account for their behavior by inferring an inherited illness of the ‘brain’ or ‘mind.’⁷

⁵ For what follows, cf. A. Winterling, ‘Zu Theorie und Methode einer neuen Römischen Kaiser Geschichte,’ in *Zwischen Strukturgeschichte und Biographie*, pp. 1–11.

⁶ Cf., however, P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque*, Paris, 1976, pp. 717–19; K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal: Sociological Studies in Roman History* 2, Cambridge/New York, 1983, p. 170; C. Witschel, ‘Verrückte Kaiser? Zur Selbststilisierung und Außenwahrnehmung nonkonformer Herrscherfiguren in der römischen Kaiserzeit,’ in *Einblicke in die Antike. Orte—Praktiken—Strukturen*, ed. C. Ronning, Munich, 2006, pp. 87–129.

⁷ F. Wiedemeister, *Der Cäsarenwahnsinn der julisch-claudischen Imperatorenfamilie geschildert an den Kaisern Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero*, Hannover, 1875, p. X.

'Melancholic depression' for Tiberius,⁸ 'monomania' and 'madness' for Caligula,⁹ 'congenital stupidity' for Claudius,¹⁰ and 'periodical manic attacks' with occasional 'raving' for Nero¹¹ were, among others, the results of his retrospective diagnostics. Methodologically similar works were published in 1924 by Hans van Hentig and in 1958 by Albert Esser.¹²

The second approach to 'imperial madness' assumed it to be, by contrast, a kind of occupational illness of absolute monarchs, an anthropological constant that could be identified in various periods. From this perspective, 'imperial madness' was a specific condition to which only autocrats were susceptible and not, as Wiedemeister thought, a normal mental illness that the emperors developed either by chance or by genetics. In 1894, Ludwig Quidde described 'the traits of the disease' in the following way: 'megalomania, increasing to the point of self-deification, defiance of every legal constraint . . . senseless and pointless brutal cruelty'. It differs from other mental illnesses in that 'the ruler's position prepares an especially fruitful ground for the germ of such a condition and allows it an unhindered development that would hardly be possible otherwise'.¹³

Quidde's crazy 'Caligula' displayed so many obvious similarities to the reigning German kaiser Wilhelm II that his treatise went through thirty editions in a short period, while bringing its author imprisonment and the end of his academic career.¹⁴ A further consequence of the article's contemporary political significance was that Quidde's conception of 'imperial madness' never received serious critical examination in classical scholarship.¹⁵ It was, in fact, a quite illuminating account of the correlations between sociopolitical roles and mental illness. Nevertheless, this second approach is vulnerable to the same objections as the first: against both interpretations of Roman 'imperial madness' one can observe that, first, neither has a secure foundation in the sources. Both assume the literal truth of the tradition and are thus based on claims that are partly proven, partly obvious defamatory fictions. Second, both are based on a problematic methodological premise, in that they assume the transhistorical invariability of psychopathological phenomena, independent of the different social and cultural contexts of the periods in which

⁸ Ibid., pp. 25, 40, 48, 50.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 94, 96, 99, 122.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 210.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 233, 236, 263, 272.

¹² H. v. Hentig, *Über den Cäsarenwahnsinn. Die Krankheit des Kaisers Tiberius*, Munich, 1924; A. Esser, *Cäsar und die julisch-claudischen Kaiser im biologisch-ärztlichen Blickfeld*, Leiden, 1958.

¹³ L. Quidde, *Caligula. Eine Studie über römischen Cäsarenwahnsinn*, 32nd edn, Berlin, 1926, p. 7.

¹⁴ K. Holl, *Ludwig Quidde (1858–1941). Eine Biographie*, Düsseldorf, 2007.

¹⁵ Cf. F. Hampl, "Cäsarenwahnsinn". Eine Betrachtung über Herkunft, Inhalt und Bedeutung eines fast vergessenen Begriffs, in *Corolla memoriae Erich Swoboda dedicata*, Cologne/Graz, 1966, pp. 126–36.

they occur. Third, the respective diagnoses presuppose that the anthropology and psychopathological science current in the era of their authors—developed in response to phenomena of that time—are in fact transhistorically valid and can be applied to other times and cultures. That this is not true is clear from the historically conditioned conception of madness applied by Wiedemeister and Quidde. Their construction departs from today's psychology and psychiatry in how it is distinguished from other psychopathological phenomena and with regard to the issue of its inherited biological conditions.¹⁶

In sum, the state of research suggests the following comparison. Just as in 'mainstream' scholarship in ancient history, the assumption of 'settled political conditions' in the Roman imperial period is based on a *constitutional anachronism*, so the medical and anthropological interpretations of 'imperial madness' are based on a *psychological anachronism*. In what follows I will try to develop alternatives to both.

SOCIOPOLITICAL STRUCTURES AND 'IMPERIAL MADNESS'

In republican Rome, over the course of centuries a sociopolitical order had established itself that was characterized by the collective rule of an aristocracy.¹⁷ A political organization, often anachronistically called a 'state', used fixed terms of offices, and careful regulation of how these offices were acquired and supervised, to assure a wide distribution of power within the upper class. At the same time, political structures reinforced the perception of a fundamental difference between two social spheres. On the one side was the 'public' sphere (*res publica*), which concerned all citizens and in which rule was taken in turns. On the other side, there was the realm of the household, the *domus*, in which individual citizens as 'private' parties exercised permanent rule over their dependents. Social stratification took the form of a hierarchy that was directly connected with political structures, as political offices generated social honor: the Latin term *honor* designates both.

It is important to recognize that this entire sociopolitical order was intended to prevent the long-term rule of one individual, that is, a monarchy. In the civil wars of the late Republic, however, a new political position emerged, one that was based on a monopoly of military power and a privileged access to the economic resources of the empire, which as such had a clear autocratic character. This was the role of the emperor. It was a role that was incompatible with the traditional sociopolitical

¹⁶ On the history of interpretations of madness, see W. Leibbrand and A. Wettley, *Der Wahnsinn. Geschichte der abendländischen Psychopathologie*, Freiburg/Munich, 1961.

¹⁷ The following section draws on A. Winterling, *Politics and Society in Imperial Rome*, Malden, MA, 2009, pp. 9–33, 58–76, 103–19.

order, within which it acquired an illegitimate, usurpatory character. In the context of the social hierarchy, the emperors collided with the standing distribution of honors, for there were always older men of consular rank who were formally superior to them. With respect to the distinction between 'private' and 'public' spheres, between *domus* and *res publica*, the emperors were equally anomalous, as they were neither temporary *magistratus* nor nonpolitical *privatus*. This was illustrated, for example, by the fact that their property was not subject to ordinary private inheritance law, but neither was it considered part of the public financial resources belonging to the *aerarium*.

Although the imperial role quickly established itself as a necessary one, the emperors faced a fundamental lack of acceptance from the rest of the aristocratic society. This is rather clear from the astonishingly low level of inhibitions the ancient Romans felt with regard to killing a monarch: of the twelve emperors who reigned in the first century CE, only five died a natural death. The emperors nonetheless had no choice but to maintain the old sociopolitical order. Due to the close integration of politics and society, and the direct link between political office and social honor, the abolition of republican political institutions would have meant the abolition of the upper class itself and the social hierarchy as a whole—which was unthinkable for many reasons, not least because the emperors themselves needed prestigious senators to command the legions and to govern the provinces.

My first thesis, then, is that the simultaneous coexistence and incompatibility of monarchy and *res publica* in imperial Rome led to paradoxical problems for aristocratic actors: intentional actions had unwanted side effects that contradicted the actors' intent. The emperors, on the one hand, counteracted the usurpatory character of their rule by having the Senate confer on them offices based on the republican constitutional order. Thus they stabilized their own political position, but paradoxically in the long run also destabilized it, since the legitimating force of republican institutions was constantly revalidated—which, among other things, hindered the establishment of a constitutional order of succession, and with that proper monarchical legitimacy.

In terms of social stratification, the emperors also allowed themselves to be granted exceptional honors: statues in urban public space, triumphs, consulates. All these honors nonetheless remained oriented toward the traditional republican political hierarchy and were as a rule granted to them by decree of the Senate. The emperors paradoxically confirmed the validity of the old hierarchy, which did not include a monarch, precisely by invalidating it and placing themselves at its peak.

No less paradoxical was the situation of the senators. By providing legal validation and honor to the man in power, they called attention to their continuing importance as a political aristocracy, but at the same time also cemented their impotence.

Although they had to confirm and honor the emperor, they did not have the privilege of selecting him: this belonged to the military or to the predecessor on the throne, or was the result of court intrigue.

How did the emperor and the aristocracy handle this paradoxical situation? A device of decisive importance—here is my second thesis—was a system of two-level, ambiguous communication between emperor and aristocrats.¹⁸ On the level of explicit statements, everything was expressed as if there was no superior imperial power and the magistracies and the Senate retained their old powers. On the latent level of unspoken communication, however, it was always clear that the emperor was there, and that the actions of all others were oriented toward what he wanted. The first emperor, Augustus, was distinguished by the fact that he perfectly mastered this form of double communication and required it of others, thus making explicit orders and obedience largely superfluous in his relations with the Senate. He acted like a normal senator, lived in modest material conditions, honored the Senate and its members—but at the same time systematically built up his political, military, and economic power. Conversely, the Senate and magistrates acted outwardly as if there was no emperor—while doing everything that corresponded to his wishes.

Our sources offer glimpses of the latent becoming manifest. Tacitus, for instance, reports a senatorial debate in the presence of Tiberius. As was typical with important questions, the senators were about to vote openly and one by one, when the senator Cn. Calpurnius Piso asked the emperor: 'In which position will you vote, Caesar? If first, I have something to follow, but if after everyone else, then I am afraid lest I disagree out of ignorance.'¹⁹

The incompatibility of a monarchy with an aristocratic republic, and the impossibility of integrating the emperor into the traditional political order, thus characterized the sociopolitical structures of imperial Rome. The results were paradoxical conditions for taking action and a system of ambiguous communication. The emperor had unrestricted power but was also under permanent threat from the aristocracy. The 'good' Roman emperors tried to conceal the exceptional nature of their position and thus win aristocratic acceptance. In this context, what did the behavior of the emperors represented as 'mad' look like?

Caligula became emperor at the age of twenty-four.²⁰ At the beginning of his reign, he continued to employ ambiguous communication in the style of Augustus.

¹⁸ For a more complete account, see A. Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography*, Berkeley, 2011, pp. 9–15, 23–31, and passim.

¹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 1.74.5–6.

²⁰ For the status of the biographical research, see A. A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, London, 1989; C. Ronning, 'Zwischen *ratio* und Wahn. Caligula, Claudius und Nero in der altertumswissenschaftlichen Forschung', in *Zwischen Strukturgeschichte und Biographie*, pp. 253–76.

In a speech before the Senate, for example, he proclaimed that power would be shared, but also paraded before the assembled senators his bodyguard, the elite of the praetorian cohorts—an extremely vivid display of imperial force. This period of peaceful relations between emperor and aristocracy ended with a large-scale conspiracy that involved leading members of the Senate. Caligula responded by giving a speech in the Senate, preserved by Cassius Dio, in which he said things that no one had ever dared say there before. He openly accused the senators of hating him and trying to kill him.²¹ He called them hypocrites and thus revealed the obsequious flattery of the senators toward the emperor for what it was. In doing so, he destroyed the complex structure of ambiguous communication and laid bare the central problems that decades of effort had obscured: the fundamental discrepancy between imperial power and aristocratic interests, the lack of acceptance of the emperor, and the threat to his person from the senators themselves.

In the period that followed, the emperor's power meant that an obsequious style of communication remained necessary for the aristocracy—even though Caligula was having none of it and indeed made it appear ridiculous. The two men mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, who had sworn an oath to sacrifice their lives or to fight as gladiators if the emperor recovered from his illness, were forced to do so to avoid breaking their oath.²² They had doubtlessly assumed that in the case of his death they would have nothing to fear, while if he did recover they would be rewarded. But Caligula, willfully, took their flattery at face value. He ignored what they had actually meant and confronted them with what they had in fact said.

A similar circumstance must also lie behind the story of Caligula's conversation with the Moon goddess. The senator L. Vitellius, father of the future emperor and in general known for successful flattery, is reported to have been the first to honor Caligula as a god.²³ This was nothing out of the ordinary, as senators since the time of Caesar had tried repeatedly to flatter the ruler with claims of divinity. Augustus and Tiberius had always refused such attempts within Rome; Caligula, according to Cassius Dio, reacted in the following way. During an encounter with Vitellius, Caligula claimed to be conversing with the Moon goddess and asked Vitellius if he could see her beside him.²⁴ Naturally, Vitellius did not really believe that Caligula was a god, and Caligula could hardly have thought otherwise. Again, the emperor unmasked flattery by taking the flatterer literally. Vitellius either had to admit that he saw only Caligula, own up to his dishonesty, and confess that he did not really

²¹ Cass. Dio 59.16.2–7.

²² Cass. Dio 59.8.3–4; Suet. *Cal.* 27.2.

²³ Suet. *Vit.* 2.5.

²⁴ Cass. Dio 59.27.5.

think that Caligula was a god—which would have achieved precisely the opposite of what he had intended with his flattery—or else act as if he saw the phantom goddess next to an emperor he really did consider divine. In other words, he had to act as if he was out of his mind. The way in which Vitellius got out of the situation testifies to his communicative skills. He cast down his eyes, Dio tells us, and softly replied: ‘Only for you gods, Lord, is it possible to see one another.’²⁵

With regard to the nature of our sources, it is illuminating to compare this anecdote with its counterpart in the biography of Caligula by Suetonius. There it is merely mentioned that Caligula had conversations with the Moon goddess, thus giving the impression that the emperor was simply deranged and considered himself a god.²⁶

Now for what is perhaps Caligula’s most famous action. Cassius Dio writes that in the period after the senatorial conspiracy Caligula intended to appoint his favorite horse, Incitatus (‘Firebrand’), to the consulship. In this case, the background to this apparently insane idea is clarified by a comparison with the parallel passage in Suetonius. There we learn that, besides a marble stall, an ivory manger, and purple finery, the emperor also gave his horse a *domus*: a house with a complete retinue of servants and luxurious tableware, so that guests received in the horse’s name could be entertained in as fine a style as possible. Finally, Suetonius says he intended to honor Incitatus with the consulship.²⁷

As Tacitus relates in detail, the senatorial households of the period were a central instrument for the manifestation of social status and were the object of such competition that senators were occasionally driven to ruin.²⁸ The outward, material representation of rank became all the more important the less real political power the old nobility enjoyed. The consulate, which bestowed the highest honor within the social hierarchy, was, as before, the most important career goal for aristocrats. According such wealth and honor to a horse was therefore a way to turn the most important end of aristocratic life and the traditional political hierarchy as a whole into an object of ridicule and to symbolically devalue it.

That Caligula was concerned with the distribution of honor within society, and thus with his own position in the hierarchy as well, is illustrated by another story. After the next extensive conspiracy—the aristocratic response to the consul-elect Incitatus—the emperor, according to Dio, actually *forbade* the customary senatorial honours for his person:

²⁵ Cass. Dio 59.27.6.

²⁶ Suet. *Cal.* 22.4.

²⁷ Cass. Dio 59.14.7; Suet. *Cal.* 55.3.

²⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 3.55.1–2.

For he in no way wanted it to seem that anything that brought him honor (*timē*) lay in their hands, as if they were more powerful than him and able to do him favors, as to an inferior. He thus often criticized things done for him, as they did not add to his glory but rather diminished his strength.²⁹

This sentence of Cassius Dio—from whatever source he in turn may have gotten it—is all the more credible since the author elsewhere is eager to portray the emperor as a lunatic. It indicates that Caligula was quite aware of the paradoxical nature of the emperor's position and tried to overcome it, both by destroying the aristocratic social hierarchy and by creating for himself a kind of honor beyond that which the republican offices could convey.

Nero was sixteen years old when he became emperor of Rome in 54 CE.³⁰ His mother, Agrippina, sister of Caligula and organizer of one of the conspiracies against her brother, had used a poisoned mushroom to dispose of her husband and uncle, the emperor Claudius, to assure her son's succession to the throne. The first five years of Nero's rule are described as a happy time. Real control of the government belonged to Nero's teacher Seneca, the philosopher and senator, as well as the praetorian prefect Burrus. In his first speech to the Senate—composed by Seneca—the young emperor is said to have promised that under his principate *domus* and *res publica*, household and polity, would be kept separate.³¹ This was a reference to the general increase in the importance of the imperial court under Claudius, as well as to the general problem of how to fit the emperor into the political structures of the Republic. What exactly Seneca was envisioning is unclear—as shown above the emperor's exceptional, usurpatory position meant that he could be neither *privatus* nor *magistratus*—but the promise naturally made a good impression on the senators, if they took it seriously.

It is telling to see how Nero positioned himself regarding the distinction between public and private in the years after about 60 CE, when he had emancipated himself from his mother and his teacher—both of whom died unnatural deaths. It is reported that he celebrated banquets of increasing length and opulence, finally holding them in public spaces in the middle of the city. Tacitus gives an extensive description of one of these banquets and comments that Nero 'used the whole city as his house'.³² After the Great Fire in 64, Nero built his *domus aurea*, a giant palace-complex in the center of the city that took up parts of two of the seven hills along

²⁹ Cass. Dio 59.23.3–4.

³⁰ For the status of the biographical research, see E. Champlin, *Nero*, Cambridge, MA/London, 2003.

³¹ Tac. *Ann.* 13.4.2 ('discretam domum et rem publicam').

³² Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1 ('tota urbe quasi domo uti'); cf. Suet. *Nero* 27.2.

with the intervening ground. Suetonius preserves some mocking verses composed at the time: 'Rome is going to be his house. Move to Veii, citizens! Unless this house takes up Veii as well.'³³

This spatial expansion of the imperial *domus* in the city had parallels in Nero's political projects. After the discovery of the Pisonian conspiracy in 65, in which wide circles of the senatorial aristocracy were implicated, Nero was rumored to have planned to poison the entire Senate at a banquet and then to rule the Roman Empire with his freedmen and Roman knights.³⁴ We need not comment on the truth of this rumor. What is certainly true is that under Nero the political organization of the old *res publica* became less and less important compared with the new structures originating in the imperial court and financial administration, staffed by freedmen and knights. To put the imperial household *in place of* the city and a patrimonial rule *in place of* the aristocratic Republic was Nero's consistent response to the ambivalence of the emperor's position with regard to the traditional distinction between private and public spheres.

What about his singing and his passion for chariot racing? The sources agree throughout on three points. First, Nero undertook these appearances in all seriousness, and with artistic ambition. He was instructed by the best-known performers of his age, paid attention to nutrition, and was disciplined in training his voice. He obeyed with embarrassing precision the rules of the competitions and had great respect for the judges; other people also won prizes in the contests he entered (although, according to Cassius Dio, he let them win to make his own victories seem more credible). Second, from the very beginning members of the foremost senatorial and equestrian families joined him onstage—voluntarily, on account of alluring rewards, or because they were forced, as is sometimes claimed. The common people of Rome were thrilled by the emperor's performances: Nero's *popularitas* was enormous. Third, Nero saw his artistic activities in a Greek context. His first public appearance was in Neapolis (modern Naples), which he took to be the most Greek city in Italy, while the high point of his career was his tour through Greece, where he won with a ten-horse chariot at Olympia and achieved countless victories in musical competitions.

According to Tacitus, Nero took care to emphasize that 'horse-racing had often been a pursuit of kings and leaders of old, made famous by the songs of bards and offered as an honor to the gods.'³⁵ Thus it appears that Nero associated his activities with the agonal traditions of archaic Greece. There, as is well known, nobles

³³ Suet. *Nero* 39.2.

³⁴ Suet. *Nero* 43.1.

³⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 14.14.1.

used their victories at Olympia and elsewhere to gain glory and to advertise their noble status before a public that transcended the limits of individual cities. The reports of Nero's return from Greece show that he too intended his performances as a display of his imperial rank. His arrival in Neapolis with a team of gray horses was so lavish and elaborate that part of the city wall had to be demolished to create adequate space. The situation was similar in Antium and Albanum, and even in Rome itself, where his arrival also required removing a section of the wall. At the front of the procession the crowns won by Nero were carried. Then came wooden tablets inscribed with the name of the contest, the type of competition, and the statement that 'Nero Caesar won this victory, the first of all the Romans from the beginning of the world to do so'.³⁶ Then came Nero himself, riding in the chariot used by Augustus in his triumphal processions, dressed in a purple robe and a Greek cloak decorated with golden stars, with the crown of an Olympic victor on his head and the laurel wreath of the Pythian games in his right hand.³⁷ He was accompanied by a guard of soldiers, by knights, and—Suetonius is too ashamed to say it, but not Cassius Dio—by senators. The procession went into the Circus Maximus, where an arch also had to be knocked down to permit entry, and from there across the Forum to the Capitoline and to the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine.

According to Cassius Dio, the entire city was decorated with garlands. The whole population, 'and especially the senators', shouted out in chorus:

Hail Olympic victor! Hail Pythian victor! Augustus! Augustus! Hail Nero, our Hercules! Hail Nero, our Apollo! The only victor of the grand tour! The only one from the beginning of time! Augustus! Divine voice! Blessed are they who may hear you!³⁸

What was going on in Rome? Was the city experiencing collective imperial madness? The whole thing was certainly extremely well organized, by among others the Augustiani, a troop of 4,000 trained applauders retained by Nero. The spectators were offered a magnificent show; as for the senators, there was surely little else they could do in the situation. Clearly the grandiose ceremony, exceptional in every respect, was Nero's way of expressing the corresponding preeminence of his position as a monarch. The *mise en scène* alluded to traditional Roman forms of representation of extraordinary successes. The whole procession and the imperial vehicle

³⁶ Cass. Dio 62(63).20.2.

³⁷ Suet. *Nero* 25.1.

³⁸ Cass. Dio 62(63).20.5–6.

were reminiscent of military triumphs, in particular those of Augustus, Nero's great-grandfather.

The decisive point, however, is that the basis for Nero's presentation as emperor did not include any reference to the *res publica*. The traditional political hierarchy, in which social status resulted from political offices, that is, out of achievements for the polity, and in which the emperor had no place, seems here to have been swept away and replaced with something else. In a way, achievements remained the basis for assigning status. But it was no longer the *honos* of magistracies but rather victories in competitions that were presented as the basis of imperial prestige, with support from the literary tradition on the ideals of the archaic Greek nobility. The old Roman hierarchy was subordinated to this new vision: senators could or had to appear onstage in person, in Greece as in Rome, and were made part of a triumphal procession aimed at expressing agonistic glory.

In an illuminating essay on Seneca and Nero, Rolf Rilinger has argued that Nero was an all-too-eager student of his teacher: having made an extensive study of Greek history, he chose forms of self-representation that harked back to those times.³⁹ Yet the relation to the social paradox of the emperor's role should clearly be evident in this case as well. While Caligula, granting the consulship to his horse, aimed at the destruction of the old aristocratic hierarchy, Nero offered a Greek-agonistic alternative to achieve his goal of, in the words of Suetonius, 'immortality and eternal fame'.⁴⁰

Domitian, the third allegedly insane emperor of the first century, ascended the throne in 81 CE at the age of twenty-nine.⁴¹ He tackled the problem of being a monarch in an aristocratic republic differently from Caligula or Nero. The scarcely credible reports of the banquets that he designed to terrorize the aristocracy indicate that he forged new paths in the realm of interaction and personal relationships.

Already under Augustus, the original multipolar system of political friendships within the republican aristocracy began to be superseded by a new unipolar system based on friendship with the emperor.⁴² Every morning, all senators and the most important knights came to the *salutatio* in the palace of the emperor, and many of

³⁹ R. Rilinger, 'Seneca und Nero. Konzepte zur Legitimation kaiserlicher Herrschaft,' in idem, *Ordo und dignitas. Beiträge zur römischen Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte*, Stuttgart, 2007, pp. 253–80.

⁴⁰ Suet. *Nero* 55.

⁴¹ For the status of the biographical research, see B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, London, 1992; P. Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, London/New York, 1997; D. Schnurbusch, 'Rationalität und Irrationalität. Die Flavier in der Sicht der biographischen Forschung,' in *Zwischen Strukturgeschichte und Biographie*, pp. 277–94.

⁴² A. Winterling, *Aula Caesaris. Studien zur Institutionalisierung des römischen Kaiserhofes in der Zeit von Augustus bis Commodus (31 v. Chr.–192 n. Chr.)*, Munich, 1999, esp. pp. 161–94, and 'Die Freundschaft der römischen Kaiser,' in *Zwischen Strukturgeschichte und Biographie*, pp. 207–32.

them were regularly invited to banquets in small groups: these were the two most important rituals that traditionally expressed friendship with the head of a household.⁴³ Due to the large number of people involved, these connections to the emperor could not be based on a close personal relationship. Imperial *amicitia* thus had an institutional character, independent of the personal feelings of the people involved. In the context of the system of ambiguous communication, a 'good' emperor, such as Augustus, preserved the outward form of old relationships symbolizing aristocratic equality. He remained on such occasions an approachable figure for senators and knights. These could, moreover, hope to win imperial favor through personal acquaintance and obtain a place among the emperor's circles of trusted friends.

But here, too, imperial action had, in the long run, paradoxical consequences. The advantage of appearing an accessible figure for the aristocracy came with the disadvantage that the symbolic meaning of the originally egalitarian and freely chosen aristocratic friendship, in which a monarch had no place, would eventually be taken seriously. This obstructed the development of ceremonial forms of interaction between emperor and aristocracy symbolic of a hierarchical relationship. The friendlier the emperor was with the aristocracy, the less he actually appeared as an emperor.

Domitian is reported to have complied with the aristocracy's need for personal communication with the emperor, but to have cast this in a new mold. Presence at regular imperial morning receptions became obligatory for senators; the same was true for banquets, which were held for large groups, sometimes up to several hundred people, in the newly built palace. Similar things had been done under his predecessors; the decisive difference, however, was that now, presence at the emperor's events was in no way connected with imperial favor, but rather was part of the ritual of monarchy. Pliny, writing under Trajan, notes that the *salutationes* of Domitian were a source of anxiety both for those who were admitted and for those turned away. At his banquets, the emperor, having already eaten on his own, only pretended to share his meal with the senators, while keeping them under unfriendly observation.⁴⁴

The situation seems to have become acute after the rebellion of Saturninus in 89, when Domitian had alleged or real sympathizers prosecuted for *maiestas*, while the rest of the Senate had to continue to prove their friendship with visits in the morning and banquets at night. In the emperor's council, the *consilium*, traditionally the domain of closer intimates, he assembled the most eminent who were by no means powerful based on closeness to the emperor, and consulted them only on

⁴³ On the *salutationes* and banquets in the imperial palace, see Winterling, *Aula Caesaris*, pp. 117–60.

⁴⁴ Plin. *Paneg.* 49.6.

trifling matters, while they stood, as Juvenal puts it, ‘with the pallor of a great and wretched friendship on their faces.’⁴⁵

The paradox was that an egalitarian approach to the aristocracy could strengthen the emperor’s position, while the ceremonial forms involved simultaneously undermined the development of his special status as a monarch.⁴⁶ Domitian tried to overcome this problem by continuing old forms of interaction while utilizing them in new ways. Friendship thus became a tool for the emperor to tame and control the aristocracy at court.

The instrumentalization of old republican social forms for monarchical ends is also apparent in Domitian’s other actions. For instance, he used the most important part of the old political system, the magistracies, for displaying and consolidating his rule. He held the consulate almost every year. He was accompanied by twenty-four lictors, twice as many as a normal consul and the traditional number for a dictator under the Republic. Most important, in 85 he became censor for life. This gave him the legal power to control the composition of the Senate by adding new members and excluding old ones. Previous emperors had of course the *de facto* power to influence the Senate’s membership. But now it seemed that the monarch was openly aiming at a ‘hostile takeover’. The most important republican offices were legally reconfigured as instruments of monarchic rule.

All in all, it seems that Domitian sought to transfigure the magistracies from a hierarchy of honorary offices into an efficient administrative organization in service of the emperor. Suetonius, who can hardly be suspected of a positive bias, writes in his biography: ‘He was so careful to restrain both the urban magistrates and those in charge of the provinces that there were never more honest or just officeholders than at that time.’⁴⁷

What, then, did these three ‘mad’ emperors have in common? All three were autocrats—that is, they did not attempt to hide their special position as emperor behind the facade of a restored republic but rather put it on public display and asserted it even in the face of resistance. If one recontextualizes the strange behaviors reported about them in the literary sources by relating them to the paradoxical position of the emperor in Rome’s sociopolitical structures, our information about them becomes much clearer.

We can observe, first, their attempts to destroy old forms of communication and the old political hierarchy: these included the unmasking of ambiguous communication and the caricature of the aristocracy’s honorary offices through the horse’s

⁴⁵ Juv. 4.74–75.

⁴⁶ Cf. Winterling, *Politics and Society*, pp. 34–57.

⁴⁷ Suet. *Dom.* 8.2.

consulate in Caligula's case. Second, the attempt to develop alternatives to the old political structure and the social hierarchy: the replacement of the old *res publica* with the imperial court and the grounding of imperial rank in the Greek, agonal accomplishments of Nero. Third, the attempt to instrumentalize the old republican structures to serve the goals of monarchy: the transformation of friendship with the emperor into an instrument for the control of the aristocracy and the use of the old political organization as a device for the emperor's rule by Domitian.

Destruction, alternatives, instrumentalization—all were tactics in a struggle against the ancient fundamental structures of a politically integrated society in favor of an open, stable, nonparadoxical monarchy.

MENTAL STRUCTURES AND 'IMPERIAL MADNESS'

The integration of politics into Roman society makes it anachronistic to interpret these premodern political structures with concepts developed to analyze modern political systems. Similarly, a critique of the research carried out by historians of medicine demonstrates why it is impossible to use psychological concepts developed for modern human subjects to make retrospective diagnoses of the Roman emperors. What is taken for normal and abnormal behavior is not transhistorically valid but dependent on the social relations and cultural models to which people in each age are subject.

There are various illustrious precursors for historical psychology as a major theme within historical anthropology, which investigates not what is constant but rather what changes in human structures through history.⁴⁸ One example is Norbert Elias' examination of the origin of the modern human psyche since the Middle Ages, involving the formation of emotional control and superego structures in parallel with the origin of modern society and the modern state.⁴⁹ Another is Michel Foucault's research into the construction and exclusion of madness as part of the process of distinguishing a disenchanted, rational European world in the early modern period.⁵⁰ Ethnopsychanalytic studies in non-European groups and societies and, for instance, the culture-and-personality school in American ethnology in the 1940s have also been an important source of methodological inspiration in this area.⁵¹ The

⁴⁸ See A. Winterling, 'Begriffe, Ansätze und Aussichten Historischer Anthropologie,' in *Historische Anthropologie*, ed. idem, Stuttgart, 2006, pp. 9–29.

⁴⁹ N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, transl. E. Jephcott, rev. edn, Oxford, 2000.

⁵⁰ M. Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans J. Murphy and J. Khalfa, London/New York, 2006.

⁵¹ Cf., among others, the works of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Abram Kardiner, and Cora Du Bois.

individual results of this research have been criticized, but one point, to my knowledge, has remained unassailable: the characteristics of the human psyche are closely interlinked with the social and cultural structures of the society in which the people live. This means that the human psyche likewise is subject to historical change.

We cannot, of course, ask the Roman emperors to lie down on the divan. Participatory observation is also impossible for the ancient historian of today. We thus remain dependent on written sources. Yet as far as I know, not even a promising start has been made for a historical psychology of the Roman aristocracy. What constituted a healthy aristocratic individual; what counted as abnormal; how self-control and the emotions were structured; how shame, embarrassment, anxiety, love, and other emotions were expressed—these and like questions must be approached through the study of numerous examples of individual actions and their contemporary evaluations, classified by period and interpreted systematically. This is a wide and almost completely untouched field for future research.

However, our concluding question of whether the behavior of the three emperors before us had psychopathological causes need not wait for the development of such a historical psychology. Since we can reconstruct the aim and meaning of their actions, a comparison with two contemporary descriptions will suffice: first, a description of psychopathological phenomena; second, a description of ideal aristocratic behavior.

For a glimpse into the psychopathology of the time, we can turn to A. Cornelius Celsus, a scholar alive during the reign of Tiberius, who in his *De Medicina* gives a systematic treatment of the phenomenon of *insania*, madness.⁵² He categorizes it as a disease (*morbus*) manifested in nonsensical action, foolish speech, or baseless feelings of anxiety. It can bring exaggerated sorrow or joy, innocuous or violent behavior. Besides temporary disturbances of the mind (*mens*) by fever, Celsus distinguishes in long-term cases between the occurrence of hallucinations (*imagines*),⁵³ in which the understanding is not affected, and delusional disturbances of the understanding, that is, affecting the *mens* or *animus* itself.⁵⁴

Galen, the famous doctor and philosopher who wrote in the second century CE, makes a similar distinction. As an example of the first type of disturbance, he offers the case of a doctor named Theophilus who—although he could otherwise speak and think coherently—believed that he was surrounded day and night by flute players, constantly making noise and watching him. He would go around the house shouting and ordering that they be thrown out. As an example of a disturbance affecting the

⁵² Celsus 3.18.1–3.20.1.

⁵³ Ibid., 3.18.19–20.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.18.21–22.

understanding itself, Galen describes a patient who labored under the delusion of having no head: he thought himself a decapitated tyrant. The recommended therapy was wearing a cap made of lead.⁵⁵

The social relevance of these medical descriptions is confirmed by texts of an entirely different genre, namely, the sources of Roman law. In many passages in the *Digesta*, treating parricide, other kinds of homicide, treason, injuries, and the destruction of property, it is said that *furiosi* and *insani*, that is, people not in their right mind (*non sanae mentis*), cannot be held legally responsible for their actions.⁵⁶ In the imperial period, therefore, we see attempts to make a clear distinction between madness and reasonable behavior. Madness emerges as an individual's understanding of reality that departs from that which is generally accepted by others in their surroundings. A mad person was counted as sick and was excluded from normal society. Depending on the type of madness, a doctor could prescribe—as Celsus suggests—a starvation diet, chains, beatings, or encouraging speeches to bring the mind back to its right condition.⁵⁷

What about a positive description of the ideal, aristocratic, Roman individual? If one turns, as did the Romans themselves, to the republican past, one finds an excellent specimen preserved in Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, published circa 77–79 CE. It appears in the funeral oration held by the son of L. Caecilius Metellus in 221 BCE for his father, an especially successful senator who achieved the consulate twice and was awarded a triumph for his military feats during the First Punic War. His father, the son says, reached the ten most important goals for which an intelligent man should strive. He wished to be the first among warriors, the best orator, and the most courageous general, under whose command the greatest deeds were done. He achieved the greatest honors, acquired the greatest degree of intelligence, and wanted to be considered the most important senator. Finally, he strove to assemble great wealth by honest means, to leave behind many children, and to be the most famous man of all the citizens.⁵⁸

In short, the aristocratic ideal was to be in all respects *first*, within both the nobility and the entire citizen body. That this was not a matter of egotism or vanity, but rather the fulfilment of demanding social norms and expectations, is clear from the pressure felt by those born in later generations of the most noble families. Cn.

⁵⁵ Cf. R. E. Siegel, *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology, and Function and Diseases of the Nervous System*, Basel, 1973, p. 163.

⁵⁶ Parricide: *Dig.* 1.18.13.1, 1.18.14; homicide: *Dig.* 29.5.3.11, 48.8.12; treason: *Dig.* 48.4.3.7, *Cod. Iust.* 9.7.1; injuries: *Dig.* 47.10.3.1, 9.2.5.2.

⁵⁷ Celsus 3.18.21–22.

⁵⁸ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 7.139–140.

Cornelius Scipio Hispanus, scion of a very famous line, is one example. In his epitaph from the second century BCE we read:

Through my way of life I piled high the virtues of my clan, I produced children,
I sought after the deeds of my father. I upheld the praise of my ancestors, so that
they rejoice that I was produced from them. My honor ennobled my stock.⁵⁹

One can almost feel the relief at the end of his life that, as a nobleman, he had not been a failure.

If one considers Celsus and Roman law, the conclusion is unavoidable: Caligula, Nero, and Domitian were *not* ‘mad’ in the contemporary sense. Their behavior was not based on a view of reality limited only to themselves; rather, it touched on the sensitive nerve of the age, the troubles of a newly established monarchy in a politically integrated society, and the hatred against them that was its very consequence.

If one now considers the republican aristocratic ideal, one sees that it was not the emperors described as ‘mad’ who seem peculiar but rather those praised as ‘good’. Augustus abstained from showing off the political power that he had in fact acquired, Vespasian refused to act according to his real rank in his interactions with the aristocracy, Trajan repressed his position according to the practices of ambiguous communication, and Marcus Aurelius even distanced himself from the imperial role through the practice of philosophy. These emperors may have been politically very astute, but they did not embody the old aristocratic ideals. Perhaps it is no coincidence that none of them came from the highest aristocratic families.

Caligula was the great-grandson of both Augustus and Marc Antony; Nero, great-great-grandson, nephew, and adoptive son of an emperor; Domitian the son of an emperor. All of them wanted to be—openly, visibly, and concretely—the first, the best, the bravest, the greatest, and the most famous, emulating or even surpassing their imperial ancestors, without fainthearted worrying about the damage they might do. In this respect, they appear as typical specimens of the mentality of the Roman nobility, demonstrating its continuity even at a time when political and social conditions had fundamentally changed. ‘Imperial madness’ in ancient Rome was not madness in a psychopathological sense. It was, rather, the result of the coincidence of old ideals of the Roman nobility with a paradoxical—unrestrained and unstable—monarchy.

⁵⁹ CIL I² 15 = ILS 6.

5

Contradictory Stereotypes

‘BARBARIAN’ AND ‘ROMAN’ RULERS AND THE SHAPING OF MEROVINGIAN KINGSHIP

Helmut Reimitz



THE MEROVINGIANS ARE often seen as the evil kings of the early Middle Ages par excellence. A number of popular stories depict them as rough, uncontrollable despots who continuously broke social taboos in their vanity and struggle for power. With their descent from a sea monster, a *bistea Neptunis Quinotauri similis*, one would not expect otherwise.¹ Already the first Merovingian king about whom we have more than just a few comments in our sources, Childeric (d. 482), for instance, was expelled by his own people because he had extensively abused their daughters.² But Childeric is only the first in a long genealogy of kings famous for their wild, vain, and reckless behavior.

One of the best-known examples is Childeric's grandson Chlothar I (d. 561), whose rule is well documented in our most important source for the sixth century, the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours written at the end of the century. Gregory portrays Chlothar as a particularly vain king who, even on his deathbed, could not understand why God should be calling such an outstanding person as himself out of

¹ Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III.9, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 2, ed. B. Krusch, Hannover, 1888, p. 95.

² Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II.12, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 1:1, eds B. Krusch and W. Levison, Hannover, 1951, p. 61ff.

the world.³ We also learn that he had a number of wives at the same time. Gregory presents a comprehensive list of their names and continues with a story about one of the wives named Aregund. She asked her husband for support in finding a suitable man for her sister. Chlothar was more than happy to oblige. Having seen his wife's pretty sister, he considered the matter carefully and came to the conclusion that the only suitable man was himself. Thus, he took her for his wife too.⁴

Such stories from early medieval sources have often been selected to portray the Merovingians as urge-driven violators of social taboos who were not bound by Roman or Christian morals but instead built their legitimation on more archaic codes of behavior. The creation of this stereotype goes back as far as the early Middle Ages. It was most famously articulated by the biographer of Charlemagne, Einhard, who presented the Merovingian kings as anachronistic figures ruling as 'do-nothing kings' long after the dawn of the *tempora moderna*.⁵ In his *Vita Karoli*, Einhard proved himself to be a true Carolingian humanist. He not only drew on the classical model of Suetonius to present Charlemagne as the true successor of the Roman emperors but also used his portrayal of the Merovingians as long-haired kings sitting with unwashed beards on their throne and transported to their assemblies on ox-carts as a means of contrasting Merovingian and Carolingian royal culture along the lines of the classical dichotomy between the archaic culture of the barbarian world and Roman civilization.⁶

Despite its obvious bias, presenting the Merovingians in contrast with the new Carolingian rulers and emperors who governed the renewed Roman Empire as the true heirs of Roman culture and rule, Einhard's portrayal has been highly influential in shaping the image of the Merovingians up to modern historical research. It stands at the beginning of the selection of rather diverse accounts in the sources that combine into a stereotype of mysterious, indeed occult, Dark Age kings, preserving traditions and codes that predated Roman and Christian models. In this stereotypical representation, the Merovingian kings could easily become key witnesses to the constant tension and even conflict of a barbarian mentality with its Romano-Christian environment. A recent monograph argues, for instance, that the

³ Ibid., IV.21, p. 154. For an overview of the discussion on the composition of the *Histories*, cf. now A. C. Murray, 'Chronology and Composition of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1, 2008, pp. 157–74.

⁴ Gregory, *Historiae*, IV.3, p. 136ff.

⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, 1, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, vol. 25, ed. O. Holder-Egger, Hannover, 1911, p. 2ff.

⁶ On Einhard the classicist, see D. Ganz, 'Einhard's Charlemagne: The Characterization of Greatness', in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. J. Story, Manchester, 2005, pp. 38–51; and the observations on Einhard and Tacitus (*Agricola*) in R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity*, Cambridge/New York, 2008, pp. 15–20.

barbarian nature of the Merovingians mirrors the fundamental antagonism (*agonale Grundhaltung*) of the barbarian world with the Roman and Christian environment of the post-Roman world.⁷

For proponents of such a view, this barbarian mentality is well documented in the many conflicts of the Merovingian rulers with their bishops, who are equally stereotyped as representatives of a Romano-Christian culture. The main witness for this antagonism in the Merovingian kingdom is of course Gregory of Tours, the descendant of a Roman senatorial family of the Auvergne. In his *Histories*, the bishop himself repeatedly opposes the Merovingian kings, in particular Chilperic I (d. 584). Although we will see that the barbarian nature of the kings is not particularly highlighted in many of these stories, a selective and distortive reading of his text often helps to exemplify the 'fundamental antagonism' between Roman culture and barbarian mentality in the post-Roman world. A good example is provided by an argument about a tract on the Trinity that King Chilperic had written and which he wanted to become the official teaching of the Church.⁸ The predictable outcome of this dispute in Gregory's *Histories*, where the king had to accept the bishop's theological superiority, has been held to reveal the deeply ingrained barbarian nature of the Merovingian king who, in this interpretation, reacts helplessly enraged. The rage he felt at his inability to compete with the theological authorities made the Merovingian barbaric: he bared his teeth and became dangerous and unpredictable.⁹

To be sure, one can well imagine that Chilperic was not amused with the refusal of his theological treatise. But in the account of the bishop of Tours, the king appears much less helplessly enraged than the modern interpreter wants his readers to believe. On the contrary, Chilperic actually reacts quite rationally and plans to obtain other opinions 'by wiser men' than Gregory. These, however, agree with Gregory, and Chilperic decides to abandon his theological reform. The outcome of the argument can hardly surprise us in a history written by Gregory of Tours. Although Gregory does not always present himself in such a winning pose in the many arguments with his *bête noire* Chilperic, in regard to the question of the Trinity there was no way around the theological expertise of the bishop of Tours.¹⁰ It is obvious that the stylization of Chilperic the teeth-grinding barbarian is less based on the account of

⁷ G. Scheibelreiter, *Die barbarische Gesellschaft. Mentalitätsgeschichte der europäischen Achsenzeit, 5.–8. Jahrhundert*, Darmstadt, 1999, p. 189.

⁸ Gregory, *Historiae*, V.44, p. 253.

⁹ Cf. Scheibelreiter, *Die barbarische Gesellschaft*, p. 190: 'Die Wut darüber, daß er seine Feinde nicht fassen kann, macht den Merowinger barbarisch: Er fletscht die Zähne, er wird gefährlich, unberechenbar. Hilarius und Eusebius werden ... als Feinde im agonalen Sinne [gesehen], die der eigenen Durchsetzung im Wege stehen.'

¹⁰ Cf. M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, transl. C. Carroll, Cambridge/New York, 2001, pp. 153–9.

Gregory of Tours than on the well-established stereotype of the Merovingian kings as Dark Age barbarians. It is thus a good example of the selective way in which this stereotype was created. Individual stories, even words, are often ripped out of their textual context and constructed as motifs or images in the interpretive context of an overarching mentality or tradition. They are then treated as isolated fragments of a lost mosaic of a barbarian mentality.¹¹

Within such an approach, passages from Gregory of Tours are easily combined with other pieces of evidence, such as the alleged Merovingian descent from a sea monster in the seventh-century *Fredegar Chronicle* or the portrayal of the Merovingians by Einhard two centuries later. The different contexts and perspectives of these narratives are pushed into the background as they become evidence of a common opposition of their authors to barbarian, non-Roman, or pre-Christian traditions of rule and royal legitimation. In such a rearrangement of the sources, the 'barbarous' kings of the Merovingian family become the key figures for the transmission of an archaic and above all Germanic tradition of kingship into the Middle Ages.¹²

Thus it seems important to put Merovingian rule and rulers into perspective. A closer look at when, why, and how the Merovingians were depicted as evil rulers is very helpful in this respect as the different reports present by no means a coherent critique. We only need to look at the three examples briefly mentioned so far, namely, Gregory's *Histories*, the *Fredegar Chronicle*, and Einhard's depiction of the do-nothing kings. The single perspective they share is an unflattering portrayal of the Merovingian kings. But they do so for very different reasons and in very different ways. Even the extant historiographical texts of the Merovingian period develop strikingly diverse political models for the social balance in the Merovingian *regnum*.¹³ And they are not the only texts that have come down to us from the Merovingian

¹¹ For an excellent analysis of this method, see E. Picard, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum? Quellenkritische Studien zur Germania des Tacitus und zur altnordischen Überlieferung*, Heidelberg, 1991; for the Merovingian context, see A. C. Murray, 'Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech and "Sacral Kingship"', in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, ed. idem, Toronto/Buffalo/London, 1998, pp. 121–52; for the history of kingship in late antiquity, see H. Wolfram, *Gotische Studien. Volk und Herrschaft im frühen Mittelalter* Munich, 2005, pp. 15–65; and S. Dick, *Der Mythos vom 'germanischen' Königtum. Studien zur Herrschaftsorganisation bei den germanischsprachigen Barbaren bis zum Beginn der Völkerwanderungszeit*, Berlin/New York, 2008; for the Merovingian context, see I. Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources, Artefacts*, eds R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger, and H. Reimitz, Leiden, 2003, pp. 149–71.

¹² Cf. now the critical discussion in M. Becher, 'Dynastie, Thronfolge und Staatsverständnis im Frankenreich', in *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat. Europäische Perspektiven*, eds W. Pohl and V. Wieser, Vienna, 2009, pp. 183–99 (183–4) with further references.

¹³ M. Diesenberger and H. Reimitz, 'Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft: Momente des Königtums in der merowingischen Historiographie', in *Das frühmittelalterliche Königtum*, ed. F.-R. Erkens, Berlin/New York, 2005, pp. 214–69.

period whose authors had quite different ideas about the role and function of kings in a *regnum*, which was still a relatively young political institution.¹⁴

Taken together, these interventions form a remarkably disjointed series. The extant texts can thus hardly be seen as mirroring a critical debate about a relatively stable, preconceived set of strategies or traditions of royal legitimation in the Merovingian kingdoms. Instead, they hint at a vivid and ongoing debate about the role and function of royal rule in general. It seems that for a long time after Clovis had laid the foundation of the Merovingian kingdom in Gaul, the various elites—royal, aristocratic, military, and ecclesiastical—understood this *regnum* as an ongoing social experiment. Though the political stabilization was regarded as a common challenge, the responses to this challenge were very different. The various surviving models reacted not only to contemporary historical circumstances but often to one another.¹⁵ These ambiguities and contradictions are in fact best illustrated in Gregory's *Histories*. In his many disputes with Chilperic I, Gregory presents the king as a prototype of an evil king, or, as Martin Heinzelmann put it, he is Gregory's antithesis of a good king.¹⁶ This was, however, also part of Gregory's strategy to establish his own authority as bishop of Tours in his narrative. In his many rebukes and arguments with the king, he presents himself in the mold of an Old Testament prophet before the king.¹⁷ But as a bishop and a *pastor*, Gregory was also responsible for the soul of the king. Although the bishop's efforts were eventually in vain, there were at least a few moments of hope. As Ian Wood has shown, Chilperic's portrayal in the *Histories* is sometimes contradictory and ambiguous, and even Gregory's *bête noire* had his light moments.¹⁸ In the complex interaction of Gregory's different roles as an author and as a speaking and acting figure within his *Histories*, he could not simply work with stereotypes.¹⁹ In a text that was meant to establish his religious authority as bishop of Tours, Gregory's literary strategies had to coincide with his religious message. Both Gregory the author and Gregory the actor had to refrain from foregone conclusions. At the same time, Gregory could not shape the world of his *Histories* at will. After all, it was a world in which he lived

¹⁴ S. Esders, *Römische Rechtstradition und Merowingisches Königtum. Zum Rechtscharakter politischer Herrschaft in Burgund im 6. und 7. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, 1997; idem, 'Rechtliche Grundlagen frühmittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit', in *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat*, eds Pohl and Wieser, pp. 423–33.

¹⁵ Diesenberger and Reimitz, 'Momente des Königtums'.

¹⁶ On antithesis as a literary strategy in the *Histories*, cf. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 146–52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–8.

¹⁸ I. Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, Bangor, 1994, pp. 46–50.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the interplay of Gregory's different roles, see H. Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850*, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 27–43.

together with most of his readers and many of his protagonists, including the kings themselves.

As a result, Gregory has left us with an ambiguous and differentiated image of Merovingian rule and rulers in general. Clovis I, for instance, the first Christian king of the Franks and Gregory's real *primus rex*, is not just described as the *novus Constantinus* who laid the foundation for a Catholic kingdom in Gaul.²⁰ He is also a brutal trickster who killed members of his own family.²¹ When it comes to Clovis' successors, Gregory gives a highly mixed picture. The narrative is like a collection of case stories in which the successes and failures, the virtues and vices of individual kings are portrayed side by side, and it is generally left to the readers to derive the moral lesson. The womanizer Chlothar mentioned above is a good example. His marriage to the two sisters was a clear break from the Church's rules on incest.²² Less than a decade before Gregory became bishop of Tours, there was a synod in which the bishops (among them Eufronius, Gregory's uncle and predecessor) insistently affirmed the incest ban established by older councils. But Gregory did not provide a judgment to go with his anecdotal, almost winking, account of Chlothar's behavior. Although this story and even more so the account of his death exemplify the vanity of the king, Chlothar is also compared to the biblical king David in another passage of the *Histories*.²³ To present Chlothar as a legitimate and good king was surely important in view of his sons, who were ruling the Merovingian kingdoms at the time Gregory was writing his *Histories*. But it was also important for the bishop of Tours himself. We learn from Gregory that Chlothar was the very king who had recognized that Gregory's uncle Eufronius came from a great and honorable family and therefore deserved to be named bishop of the prestigious episcopate of Tours.²⁴ And it was also Chlothar who was the first king to grant a tax exemption to the city and the church of Tours because of his reverence for Saint Martin.²⁵ As bishop of Tours, Gregory was surely concerned that Chlothar's descendants would be reminded that they should keep things that way and follow the model of their ancestor if they also wanted the protection of the saint.

²⁰ Gregory, *Historiae*, II.31, p. 77.

²¹ Cf. Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 47; and for a longer discussion of trickery in Gregory of Tours, see P. Brown, 'Introduction: Gregory of Tours', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, eds K. Mitchell and I. Wood, Leiden/Boston/Cologne, 2002, pp. 1–28.

²² See now K. Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung: Die Konstruktion eines Verbrechens (300–1100)*, Berlin, 2008, pp. 137–74.

²³ Gregory, *Historiae*, IV.20, p. 153.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.15, p. 147.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.2, p. 136, and IX.30, p. 448ff.

Chlothar's son Chilperic seems to have given Gregory fewer reasons to present him as a good ruler. Chilperic succeeded Chlothar after the latter's death in 561 together with his three half-brothers, Charibert, Sigibert, and Guntram. The ambitious Chilperic received the smallest portion, the northwestern kingdom, which was once held by his father.²⁶ When Gregory was elected bishop in 573, the city of Tours belonged to the kingdom of Sigibert I. Gregory and many other important members of his family had good connections in the court of Sigibert in Reims, where the future bishop of Tours may even have been consecrated a priest and was certainly elected bishop.²⁷ On that occasion, Gregory may have taken his oath of fealty to Sigibert and possibly also to Sigibert's successor, Childebert II.²⁸ But as metropolitan bishop of Tours, Gregory was superior to a number of bishops who were subject to Sigibert's brother Chilperic. The situation became even more complicated after Sigibert's death in 575, when Chilperic seized the opportunity to take control of Tours, which should have passed to Sigibert's son Childebert II.²⁹ Much to Gregory's chagrin, Tours belonged from that point onward to the kingdom of Chilperic, who needed to assert his power against the elites who had supported his brother Sigibert and were possibly still supporting Sigibert's wife, Brunhild, and her minor son, Childebert II. Now Gregory was not only a highly suspicious member of a familial network with close ties to the court of Brunhild and Childebert; he was also a metropolitan of a see that presently belonged to the kingdom of Chilperic but was superior to a number of bishops who were still subject to the kingdom of Chilperic's nephew Childebert II.

The ensuing conflicts and complicated relationship between Gregory and the king are well documented in Books V and VI of the *Histories*. At one point Gregory even had to defend himself against the accusation of high treason.³⁰ While Gregory surely built on writings and documents from this troubled time, it is very likely that the stylization of Chilperic as the antithesis of a good ruler belongs to the time after the death of the king in 584. As Guy Halsall has convincingly argued, many of the aspects of Chilperic's *damnatio memoriae* should be read not only as sources for the many conflicts Gregory had with Chilperic but also in the context of the time after the king's death, when the only remaining son of Chlothar I, Guntram, dictated

²⁶ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 88–101; cf. now M. Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions: A "Genealogical Charter"?', *Early Medieval Europe*, 17, 2009, pp. 1–22; and still E. Ewig, 'Die fränkischen Teilungen und Teilreiche (511–613)', in idem, *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien. Gesammelte Schriften (1952–1973)*, vol. 1, Munich, 1976, pp. 114–71.

²⁷ Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 12.

²⁸ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 32.

²⁹ Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 12ff; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 26–31.

³⁰ Gregory, *Historiae*, V.47–9, pp. 257–63.

the politics of the Merovingian kingdom.³¹ Guntram is indeed portrayed as a good and pious ruler for the most part of the narrative.³² Thus, Chilperic, the antithesis of a good ruler, might also have been an opportunity for Gregory to give spiritual and political advice to Guntram. But Gregory's *Histories* were not only about self-presentation, legitimation, and advice. They were also a historiographical experiment to develop a Christian vision for the future of the kingdom. The numerous case stories about the two rulers helped sound out the limits and opportunities of royal rule in a Christian kingdom.

In this light it is particularly interesting to note which images Gregory employed in his negative characterization of the king. In fact, Chilperic is portrayed not as an uncontrollable barbarian but as a Roman ruler. It is above all Chilperic's adoption and cultivation of the Roman imperial tradition that Gregory used for the stylization of him as an evil king. As we have already seen, Chilperic is presented as a ruler who was capable of engaging in theological debates like the Roman Christian emperors or their Byzantine successors. He also had the amphitheaters in Paris and Soissons rebuilt and put on expensive circus games.³³ Like the Roman emperor Claudius, he wanted to reform the Latin alphabet.³⁴ This image might actually fit with the self-fashioning of the king—one of Chilperic's poems has indeed survived.³⁵ In the eulogies written by Gregory's friend Venantius Fortunatus, the poet also highlights the Latin education of the king.³⁶

With this evidence, Chilperic emerges as a 'champion' of late antiquity in modern historical research, whose representation and legitimation of rule indicates the continuity and significance of the Roman tradition. This portrait is doubtlessly justified. But in Gregory of Tours's text, it is precisely with these stories that the bishop—member of an old senatorial family—criticizes Chilperic.³⁷ According to Gregory, Chilperic's poetry never really reached the standards of Latin composition. His treatise on the Trinity bordered on heresy. His writing reforms were never put into practice. And in order to finance his expensive self-representation (and likely also his wars), Chilperic both demanded many new and unjust taxes and squandered

³¹ G. Halsall, 'Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory's Writing of History', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, eds Mitchell and Wood, pp. 337–50.

³² For Guntram's stylization as an ideal ruler, see Heinzelmänn, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 60–75; for a discussion of the exceptions to the rule, see Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 51–4, and Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?'

³³ Gregory, *Historiae*, V.17, p. 216.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, V.44, p. 254.

³⁵ Chilperic's only surviving poem is a hymn, *Ymnus in solemnitate sancti Medardi episcopi*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Poetae latini medii aevi*, vol. 4:2, ed. K. Strecker, Hannover, 1923, p. 455.

³⁶ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* IX.1, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores antiquissimi*, vol. 4:1, ed. F. Leo, Berlin, 1881, p. 203.

³⁷ Cf. Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 68.

the money that in fact belonged to the Church and the poor.³⁸ As the *Histories* portrayed him, the Merovingian king oriented himself to models that in Gregory's view belonged to the past.³⁹

After the beginning of the fifth book and the beginning of his episcopate in the narrative of the *Histories*, Gregory presents his disputes with Chilperic in building on his double persona as author and actor. While the author constructs a negative characterization of Chilperic through his stories and commentary, the bishop negotiates directly with the king the possibilities and limits of his rule. In a series of direct addresses, Gregory not only points to the king's personal limits in theology, Roman culture, and questions of faith, but by using Chilperic as an antithesis to a good ruler, he also negotiates the limits of royal rule in general.

This is explicitly addressed in the first major direct confrontation between the bishop of Tours and Chilperic at a synod in 577. Chilperic had summoned this synod in Paris in order to impeach the bishop Praetextatus, whom the king accused (probably rightly) of high treason.⁴⁰ After the death of Sigibert, Praetextatus had married the widow of the king, Brunhild, to Chilperic's son Meroweck, who was actually supposed to take the queen into custody. In his *Histories*, Gregory leaves us with a relatively truncated account of what had been a political coup of Brunhild and her supporters to form an alliance with Meroweck against Chilperic's takeover. It is not unlikely that Gregory himself was involved. Before he deviated from the plans and orders of his father, Meroweck spent Easter at Tours. Chilperic managed relatively quickly to break up the marriage between Brunhild and Meroweck, but it took him a while to bring the situation fully under control.

The synod of 577 clearly shows that Chilperic felt powerful enough to confront the opposition in his kingdom. Gregory presents it as a real show trial. His extensive account of the synod and the case of Praetextatus provides us with a vivid image of the negotiations that accompanied such gatherings and their resolutions.⁴¹ After the bishops are assembled in Paris, Chilperic opens the negotiations with his accusation. Once Praetextatus' defense has been heard, the king leaves the assembly, and the bishops begin to discuss the case among themselves. It seems that the majority are in support of Chilperic, and Gregory begins to admonish his colleagues in direct

³⁸ Cf. Gregory, *Historiae*, V.17, p. 216; V.44, p. 254; and the 'obituary' of Chilperic, VI.46, p. 319ff.

³⁹ For Gregory as the man of a new age, cf. now P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome and the Formation of the Christian West*, Princeton, 2012, pp. 503–26.

⁴⁰ Gregory, *Historiae*, V.18, pp. 216–23; for a comprehensive discussion of several aspects of the synod, see Esders, *Römische Rechtstradition*, pp. 443–7; and B. Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption im frühen Mittelalter. Künstliche Verwandtschaft als soziale Praxis*, Göttingen, 1991, pp. 177–98.

⁴¹ Cf., in general, A. Weckwerth, *Ablauf, Organisation und Selbstverständnis westlicher antiker Synoden im Spiegel ihrer Akten*, Münster, 2010, pp. 91–129.

speech. The bishops should be aware of their responsibility. It was not the king's task to tell them what was right or wrong; that was precisely their duty. In his address he attempts to convince his episcopal colleagues with examples from history. Rulers such as the Roman emperor Maximus, who did not heed the advice of bishops or acted against them, lost their *imperium* and their life through the *iudicium* of the *rex aeternus*.⁴²

When Chilperic hears of this and has Gregory summoned before him, the theme comes up again in their discussion and is directly related to the question of the limits of royal power. Chilperic starts the discussion by accusing Gregory of denying him, the king, *iustitia* by protecting Praetextatus. Gregory replies that it is actually the king who has the power to correct anyone who strays from the path of *iustitia*. But who, asks Gregory, is supposed to correct the king when he acts against justice? This was a fundamental question, and Chilperic does not give an answer to it. Instead, he keeps focusing on the question of Gregory's *iustitia*. If not even the king can find justice before the bishop, what chance do the common people have? He threatens Gregory with raising voices against him in his own bishopric, as well as advertising his unjust behavior to the *populus* of the city of Tours.

In his answer, Gregory highlights the arrogance of the king, which discloses Chilperic's inability to understand what it means to be just: 'It is not for you to say whether or not I am unjust. . . . God alone, to whom the secret places of the heart are open, knows my conscience.'⁴³ At this point, Gregory the *pastor* seems to give up. *Quid plura?* There was no more to say. If the king was not willing or able to take on his pastoral advice and care for a better life, he should at least respect the *leges* and *canones* of the Church. For if he does not pay heed to their commandments, he should be aware that he will be judged by the *iudicium Dei*. Finding a solution within the legal framework of the Church seems to offer common ground for Chilperic and Gregory. The king invites the bishop to dine with him. Gregory, however, refuses to accept the invitation unless the king swears to behave according to the Church laws. Chilperic swears, but Gregory remains carefully distant. He eats a little bread, drinks some wine, and leaves Chilperic and the two other bishops who were with the king alone.

It is clear that Chilperic could not convince Gregory to support him against Praetextatus. But neither could Gregory prevent the king from pursuing the case further. Nevertheless, he seems to present his negotiation with the king as at least partly successful in having confined Chilperic's room for maneuver. But Chilperic

⁴² Gregory, *Historiae*, V.18, p. 218.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 219; English transl. L. Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks*, Baltimore, 1974, p. 278 (slightly modified).

was actually building on Church law anyway in this conflict. As Karl Ubl has shown recently, the king seems to have been responsible for a redaction of the *lex Salica* that incorporated selected parts of the incest legislation of the Church. This redaction of the law has traditionally been linked to his brother Guntram. But it is striking that the incorporated regulations fit very well the conflict with Meroweck prohibiting the nephew to marry his uncle's wife.⁴⁴ In the account of Gregory, too, Chilperic quotes the laws of the Church that Praetextatus had broken when he had concluded the incestuous marriage.⁴⁵ Chilperic was obviously not only well educated in Roman poetry and history. He and his advisers also knew how to handle the laws of the Church. But Gregory seems to have relied on his ecclesiastical authority as a bishop and the metropolitan of Tours. As long as Praetextatus kept his nerve and the case was dealt with within the procedures of ecclesiastical legislation, he should be safe.

But Gregory underestimated the king. With the help of other bishops, Chilperic tricked Praetextatus into publicly admitting his guilt, promising him full pardon if he only confessed his crimes. Praetextatus believed them and openly admitted that he planned to murder the king and put Meroweck on the throne. After that the king had a *liber canonum* brought out, to which, according to Gregory, was attached a new quire (*novus quaternio*), containing what Gregory presents as canons of doubtful provenance. In this additional quire the bishops found a clause, that any bishop who is found guilty of having committed murder or perjury should be deposed from his see and excluded from the community of the Church. The outmaneuvered Gregory had to accept that on the basis of this Church law Praetextatus had to be deposed and exiled.⁴⁶

The story gives us a wonderful glimpse of a world that Peter Brown has aptly characterized as one 'where one can never be too careful'.⁴⁷ But it also gives us a glimpse of how negotiations over the role and function of the king were conducted in Merovingian society. What seems to me particularly striking is the fundamental openness of such a debate two generations after the death of Clovis. Neither Chilperic nor Gregory gives us any answer to the crucial question of what is to be done when the king is led astray and leaves the path of justice. But in the overall narrative of the *Histories*, the conflicts and arguments of Chilperic and Gregory show competing conceptions of justice and different strategies of legitimation.⁴⁸ In his portrayal of Chilperic we see Gregory, the descendant of a Roman senatorial family, and not the

⁴⁴ Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung*, pp. 176–9.

⁴⁵ Gregory, *Historiae*, V.18, p. 217.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, V.18, p. 222ff.

⁴⁷ Brown, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 20.

⁴⁸ Cf. Esders, *Römische Rechts tradition*, p. 446ff.

barbarian Chilperic, emphasizing a discontinuity with Roman traditions of rule and legitimation.

The tension between different understandings of Roman history and models becomes even more obvious if we take a closer look at how Gregory used the Roman past in this context. In his sermon at the beginning of the trial, which appeals to the bishops to take on their responsibility in this case and not leave the decision to the king, Gregory looks back to the history of the Roman Empire too. In reminding the bishops of the fate of the emperor Maximus, he refers to a case that had already been discussed intensively at the end of the fourth century. After having been proclaimed emperor by his troops in 383, Maximus prevailed over the ruling emperor in the West, Gratian, who was killed in the same year.⁴⁹ Theodosius I had to temporarily accept the position of Maximus and divided the Western empire between the younger brother of Gratian, Valentinian II, and Maximus, who ruled until 388 as Augustus. When Maximus invaded the territory of his co-emperor, however, and the young Valentinian fled with his family to Constantinople, Theodosius marched with his army to the West. In 388, Maximus' troops were defeated, and Maximus was killed.⁵⁰

Already in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Rufinus, composed about fifteen years after the events, Theodosius demonstrated in this victory that he was a righteous Christian ruler restoring the young brother of Gratian to the Western realm, as well as to the right path of the Catholic faith.⁵¹ In his *City of God*, Augustine also built on this story, emphasizing that Theodosius not only avenged the death of Gratian but also helped Gratian's half-brother, Valentinian II, to establish his rule in the West.⁵² This abdication of power over the entire empire is one of the elements of Augustine's famous comments on Theodosius as an example of a *felix imperator*. Yves-Marie Duval has shown that Augustine used Rufinus' account in this discussion in the *City of God*. He also demonstrated, however, how in his rewriting of Rufinus, Augustine applied very different emphases, neutralizing the triumphalist tendency of Rufinus' interpretation of the events.⁵³

⁴⁹ For the usurpation of Maximus, cf. H. Leppin, *Theodosius der Große*, Darmstadt, 2003, pp. 87–115.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵¹ Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, XI.17, in *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 2:1, eds T. Mommsen and E. Schwartz, 2nd edn, ed. F. Winkelmann, Berlin, 1999, p. 1022.

⁵² Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, V.26.1, eds B. Dombart and A. Kalb, 5th edn, Stuttgart, 1993, pp. 238–40.

⁵³ Y.-M. Duval, 'L'éloge de Théodose dans la *Cité de Dieu* (V, 26, 1). Sa place, son sens et ses sources', *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 4, 1966, pp. 135–79 (repr. in *idem, Histoire et historiographie en Occident aux IV^e et V^e siècles*, Aldershot, 1997).

Gregory, who evidently relied on Rufinus in his *Histories*, and most likely knew his Augustine well too, did the same.⁵⁴ Gregory's portrayal of Theodosius follows Rufinus, emphasizing that the ruler attained victory more through the power of prayer and fasting than through force of arms. But there is no elaborate account of Theodosius' reign in Gregory. He only has a few sentences in his first book quoting a passage from Orosius' *Histories against the Pagans* and uses the same text for his equally brief summary of the reign of Maximus in the West. But here Gregory inserts an additional sentence on Martin, already bishop of Tours, who personally went to Trier to see the emperor.⁵⁵

As we have seen, Gregory refers to these events again in Book V, in his sermon at the beginning of the trial against Praetextatus. Nevertheless, it is not the model of Theodosius but only the confrontation between Maximus and Martin that is important to Gregory, for it shows how a ruler lost *gloria* and *regnum* because he did not heed the advice of the bishop of Tours. The example was well chosen for the occasion. The most comprehensive narrative of the conflict of Martin and Maximus has come down to us in the *Vita Martini* of Sulpicius Severus. The text was extremely popular from early on, and we might safely assume that the people assembled in Paris knew the story well too. Gregory himself had started to write his four books on the *Virtutes sancti Martini* most likely in the year before the synod, the same year in which Gregory's friend and protégé Venantius Fortunatus had finished a versified *Life of Martin* based on the *vita* of Sulpicius Severus that Gregory had asked him to compose.⁵⁶ Both Sulpicius and Venantius gave a comprehensive account of Martin's journey to Trier and his argument with the emperor.⁵⁷ The saint had appeared before the emperor in person to prevent Maximus from the cruel persecution of Priscillian and his followers. But Martin tried in vain. Priscillian and his followers were beheaded in Trier in 386 against the protests of not only Martin but

⁵⁴ For Gregory's reception of Rufinus, cf. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 94ff and 151ff; and idem, 'La réécriture hagiographique dans l'œuvre de Grégoire de Tours', in *La réécriture hagiographique dans l'occident médiéval: Transformations formelles et idéologiques*, eds M. Gouillet and M. Heinzelmann, Sigmaringen, 2003, pp. 15–70.

⁵⁵ Gregory, *Historiae*, I.42–3, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Cf. R. Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gall*, Princeton, 1993, pp. 13–28; on Gregory's and Venantius' work on the *Vita*, see also Gregory of Tours, *Virtutes sancti Martini*, 1.1–2, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 1:2, ed. B. Krusch, Hannover, 1885, pp. 134–211; Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Martini*, Praefatio (= 'Epistola ad Gregorium'), in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores antiquissimi*, vol. 4:1, ed. F. Leo, Berlin, 1881, p. 293ff.

⁵⁷ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 20.1–8, in *Sulpice Sévère: Vie de Saint Martin*, ed. and transl. J. Fontaine, vol. 1, Paris, 1967, pp. 294–8; and Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Martini*, IV.331–86, pp. 358–60.

also Ambrose of Milan and Pope Siricius.⁵⁸ Although they all regarded Priscillian's teaching as problematic, they sharply complained that an ecclesiastical case was decided by a tribunal under the jurisdiction of the emperor.⁵⁹ About two hundred years later, in the trial against Praetextatus, Gregory, the successor of Saint Martin in Tours, reminded both his fellow bishops and the king that they ought to keep the consequences in mind before they condemned Praetextatus.

Yet when we look at the reception of Maximus' story by Gregory of Tours, there is a very distinct shift in emphasis compared with his models. Whereas Augustine relates the story in the context of a discussion on how one could become a *felix imperator*, the most important thing for Gregory is the question of the control, judgment, and condemnation of a ruler's injustice. This is a new tone, and it can hardly be explained by supposing that in Gregory's time it had become more important to control the barbaric and undisciplined Merovingian kings. Gregory's negative stylization of Chilperic as a Roman king shows that Merovingian rulers were by no means worse than their Roman imperial predecessors; rather, the new kings could be just as bad as Roman autocrats.

The difference between Augustine and Gregory appears to derive primarily from the fact that in the context of founding the barbarian successor states, new scope was created for the negotiation of possibilities and limits of royal rule. These negotiations of the Merovingian kings with the social and political elites are well documented in the most important evidence for the interaction of bishops and kings in the Merovingian kingdom: the surviving council records of the sixth century. That these were the result of an ongoing negotiation between bishops and rulers is already evident from the protocols of the first royal council under Clovis, the Council of Orléans in 511. Clovis had proposed a list of points on which he sought advice, and which the bishops were to discuss together.⁶⁰ The gathering then presented the king with the outcome of their debates.⁶¹ From this emphasis on the

⁵⁸ For a summary of the complex series of events, R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 88–117; V. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority and the Priscillianist Controversy*, Berkeley, 1995, pp. 81–98.

⁵⁹ See the comments of B. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge/New York, 2011, p. 315ff. For a longer discussion, see H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church*, Oxford, 1976, pp. 111–69; and C. Humfress, 'Roman Law, Forensic Argument and the Formation of Christian Orthodoxy (III–VI Centuries)', in *Orthodoxie, christianisme, histoire—Orthodoxy, Christianity, History*, eds S. Elm, E. Rebillard, and A. Romano, Rome, 2000, pp. 125–47.

⁶⁰ A. Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie im frühmittelalterlichen Okzident. Die Aussage konziliarer Texte des gallischen und iberischen Raumes*, Münster, 2001, pp. 64–77; Weckwerth, *Zum Ablauf*, pp. 115–17; G. Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511–768*, Leiden, 2010; see also Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 71–87; and O. Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich*, Paderborn, 1986, pp. 23–34.

⁶¹ *Concilium Aurelianense* (511), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Concilia*, vol. 1, ed. F. Maassen, Hannover, 1893, pp. 2–10.

proceedings as the result of a negotiation, one can clearly sense that they were linked to new perspectives for the integration of the Christian Church of Gaul with the newly established *regnum*. Nevertheless, the harmony that is reflected in this text of the first royal council was to change. Over the course of the sixth century, the proceedings of the synods increasingly reflect conflicts between the kings and the bishops over the scope and extent of royal power. When, after the death of Chlothar in 561, his sons began to argue over the division of their inheritance, the bishops assembled even without being summoned by the king.⁶² The canons of the synod of Tours in 567 reveal the nervous atmosphere in the Merovingian kingdoms. The behavior of the kings was sharply criticized: their disputes had become *impedimenta* to the unity of Church and *regnum*, and the dealings of the kings were compared to those of *necatores pauperum*.⁶³ This is certainly an extreme case, but the continual negotiation of social norms and rules is also documented in the other councils.⁶⁴ From them it is clear that the newly forged perspectives and scope for negotiation in the Merovingian kingdom were not only used but strongly defended. Not even the bishops, many of whom were descended from senatorial families, wished to return to the circumstances before the general establishment of the Merovingian *regnum*. The defense of the new perspectives, however, was important both for the unity of the Church of Gaul and for the positions of its representatives, the bishops. Most of them, and not least Gregory's own family, owed their prominent position above all to the social reconfiguration of Gaul in the establishment of the Merovingian kingdom and their decision to cooperate with the new rulers.⁶⁵

Stefan Esders has shown that this new scope for negotiation was an important factor not only in the formation of an *ecclesia Galliarum* but also for the creation of the political and social structures of the barbarian successor states in general. As Esders has demonstrated, one of the most important legal foundations for royal legitimation was the oath to the ruler, which had been transposed from the context of the Roman army to the whole free population in the *regnum*.⁶⁶ But such a swearing

⁶² This is the synod of Paris (*Concilium Parisiense*, in *ibid.*, pp. 142–6), which was held between 567 and 573; cf. Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung*, p. 159ff; see also the discussion in Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*, pp. 93–4, who argues for an earlier date with 561–2.

⁶³ *Concilium Tironense* (567), in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Concilia*, vol. 1, pp. 121–36 (122); cf. Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*, p. 100ff.

⁶⁴ See Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*, pp. 77–109.

⁶⁵ For the prosopography of Gregory's family, cf. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 11–22; for the question of continuities and discontinuities of elites, cf. P. Brown, 'The Study of Elites in Late Antiquity', *Arethusa*, 33:3, 2000, pp. 321–46; and for the various social backgrounds of members of the Gaulish episcopate, S. Patzold, 'Zur Sozialstruktur des Episkopats und zur Ausbildung bischöflicher Herrschaft in Gallien zwischen Spätantike und Frühmittelalter', in *Völker, Reiche und Namen im frühen Mittelalter. Festschrift für Jörg Jarnut*, eds M. Becher and S. Dick, Munich, 2010, pp. 121–40.

⁶⁶ Esders, 'Rechtliche Grundlagen'; and *idem*, *Römische Rechtstradition*, pp. 432–37.

was preceded by negotiations with the population, the different elites, and their representatives in a city or region who had agreed, *quid pro quo*, to swear the oath. Clovis' establishment of rule *per totas Gallias* was surely accompanied by many such negotiations. That they continued to play an important role for the legitimation of rulers as well as the local elites is chronicled in Gregory's *Histories*, in particular when there were multiple Merovingian kings ruling at the same time. In the aftermath of Chilperic's death in 584, for instance, Gregory tells the story of how the representatives of two cities met to discuss which of the two kings who had asked them to swear the oath—Guntram and Childebert II—they actually ought to swear to.⁶⁷ The trial against Praetextatus provides us with another example for the negotiations that preceded such oaths. Chilperic also accused the bishop of Rouen of having distributed presents among the people of his kingdom to convince them to swear the oath of fealty to Meroweich.⁶⁸ Even the tax exemption for Gregory's own city, Tours, had been negotiated and confirmed in precisely such a context. In the late 580s, Childebert II had sent tax exactors to Poitiers and Tours, and in his depiction of the events Gregory presents himself as true defender of the city and its privileges. When the exactors wanted to use the old tax lists, Gregory provides them, and his readers, with a brief history of the tax exemption of Tours. It was originally granted by Chlothar, because of his reverence for Saint Martin, but it was also renewed and respected by all of his successors:

When Chlothar died the people swore an oath of loyalty to King Charibert, and he swore in his turn that he would not make any new laws or customs (*leges consuetudinesque*), but would secure to them the conditions under which they had lived in his father's reign. . . . King Sigibert held the city after Charibert's death, but he didn't burden it with taxation. In the same way Childebert has not made demands in the fourteen years during which he has reigned since his father's death. The city has not had to face any tax assessment at all. It lies in your power to decide whether or not tax should be collected, but beware of the harm which you will do if you act contrary to the king's sworn agreement.⁶⁹

It seems that members of the senatorial class such as Gregory were more concerned about whether the kings would preserve the privileges, the *leges* and *consuetudines*

⁶⁷ Gregory, *Historiae*, VII.12, p. 333.

⁶⁸ The accusation is already mentioned by Chilperic at the beginning of the trial and comes up again at the end: *ibid.*, V.18, pp. 217.5–7; 217.11ff; and 222.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, IX.30, p. 448ff; Gregory *of Tours: The History of the Franks*, p. 516. Gregory also recounts the granting of the privilege by Chlothar in IV.2, p. 136.

granted by their predecessors, than about their barbarian nature. In fact, in Gregory's *Histories*, Chilperic does not violate the social norms and taboos promoted by Gregory as a teeth-grinding barbarian. It is the king's reach back to imperial forms of legitimation and representation that poses a threat to the consensus on which Gregory built his vision of social order and consent. To be sure, it was evident to all involved that they still moved within Roman structures and traditions. But there was an agreement that they were to be handled in a new way. The evil kings were above all the ones who attempted to ignore this.

As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, in Gregory's case this insistence on discontinuity or on keeping the new room for maneuver that a post-Roman kingdom offered to negotiate its social, religious, and political framework is best understood as part of his efforts to promote a new Christian vision of community in his *Histories*.⁷⁰ Other political actors—bishops, representatives of cities, or members of the military elites—surely had different agendas. This is illustrated in Gregory's own text by the many arguments and negotiations about the interpretation of events and history. Taken together, they do not hint at a debate in which a conservative Roman elite tried to defend its culture and values against a group of what must have been equally conservative barbarians. Such traditionalists might well have been around. But, as we have seen, their voice was just one among many in a discourse on how to establish and stabilize a political entity that all of its members must have experienced as an ongoing political experiment. How best to integrate these different groups, elites, and traditions into a common perspective was the actual ongoing debate. And this also included the role and function of kings, their power and its limits.

From early on this had to be negotiated on a local level. But the supralocal consequences had to be taken into account by the members of the respective elites and even more so by the kings themselves. Thus, an important factor for the legitimation of the Merovingian kings was to present the king as a focus for the integration of different groups and interests: a royal center, whose position was equidistant from all the different social and ethnic groups. Eminent bishops had already given this advice to Clovis after he had expanded his reign over most of the former provinces of Gaul. In a congratulatory letter to the king on his recent baptism, Bishop Avitus of Vienne expressed his hopes that the king as *caput populorum* and *princeps gentium* would show equal justice toward all the different individuals and groups of

⁷⁰ Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, pp. 25–50, and idem, 'The Providential Past: Visions of Frankish Identity in the Early Medieval History of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*', in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1000*, eds W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne, Farnham, 2012, pp. 109–35.

the kingdom.⁷¹ And it seems that this was indeed the policy followed by the early Merovingian kings.⁷² These strategies were by and by developed into a system of rule that has been described as ‘politics of consensus’.⁷³ Through their equidistance from the different elites of the kingdom, the Merovingian kings guaranteed a balance of power that would otherwise have been difficult to imagine. Even in the late seventh century, their monopoly of rule was grounded in a positioning of kingship that granted elites equal access to the kingdom. It was only in the first half of the eighth century, when the Pippinid/Carolingian mayors of the palace increasingly monopolized access to the throne, that the rules of the game began to change.

It has repeatedly puzzled early medieval scholars why it took the Carolingians so long to depose the *rois fainéants* who had already been sharply criticized by authors writing even before the rise of the Carolingians in the first half of the eighth century. One answer to this question has of course been the sacral legitimation of the Merovingians, which some scholars assumed to have been deeply rooted in the barbarian society of the Merovingian kingdoms. I would rather find with Ian Wood the answer in the role of the kings for the social and political balance in the ‘politics of consensus’ that goes back to the establishment of Merovingian rule in the sixth century.⁷⁴ One thing that so far has gone relatively unnoticed, however, is the extent to which the development of this consensus depended on a consciously sought and defended discontinuity from the Roman foundations within which it must have been created.

⁷¹ Avitus, *Epistula* 46, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores antiquissimi*, vol. 6:2, ed. R. Peiper, Berlin, 1883, pp. 75–6; see also the translation and commentary of D. Shanzer and I. Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, Liverpool, 2002, pp. 362–9. Similar advice was given to Clovis already at the beginning of his rule; cf. Remigius of Rheims, *Epistolae Austrasicae* 1 and 2, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, vol. 3, ed. W. Gundlach, Berlin, 1892, pp. 112–13.

⁷² Cf. Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, pp. 98–123; W. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration*, 2nd edn, Stuttgart, 2002, pp. 176–85; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 41–9.

⁷³ See I. Wood, ‘Usurpers and Merovingian Kingship’, in *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*, eds M. Becher and J. Jarnut, Münster, 2004, pp. 15–31.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, *passim*, and Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, pp. 108–12.

6

Tyrannos basileus

IMPERIAL LEGITIMACY AND USURPATION IN EARLY BYZANTIUM

John Haldon and Nikos Panou



THE BYZANTINES NEVER nurtured any doubts about the value and necessity of the imperial office. Already in the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea had set the basic parameters within which the role of the emperor (*basileus*) and the nature of his rule (*basileia*) were understood and assessed throughout the Byzantine millennium. In the oration he composed in 335/6 to celebrate the Thirtieth Jubilee of Constantine I (r. 306–337), he explained that as soon as the divine Logos established in the soul of man a character in the image and likeness of God, ‘He perfected in him a sovereign species, to which He showed alone of those on earth how to rule and be ruled and to anticipate and foreknow here the promised hope of the heavenly kingdom.’¹ Thus, the Christian emperor derives his power and authority straight from God. He is chosen by God—through his election by the Senate, the army, and the people—and it is God who endows him with special skills and virtues that enable him to serve his subjects as an ideally qualified leader in an economy of salvation. In ruling his realm, an earthly copy of the celestial kingdom, he imitates the way the supreme and eternal king rules the cosmos. Monarchy, therefore, is the ideal form of government. As there is only one God, so there can be only one

¹ *De Laudibus Constantini*, IV.2, in *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 1, ed. I. A. Heikel, Leipzig, 1902, p. 203.6–11; English transl. H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius’ Tricennial Orations*, Berkeley, 1976, p. 88.

emperor—His representative among the mortals, the interpreter of His will, the vehicle of His providence.² And as long as there is a divinely sanctioned ruler on the throne, the order (*taxis*) and prosperity of the political community are guaranteed. The person of the emperor is an issue of secondary importance; it matters to the extent that it embodies the essence of the institution itself.³

Within the basic political system of the later Roman and Byzantine state, therefore, the imperial institution was absolutely fundamental. But this meant that, whatever its causes, every rebellion or revolt that was more than a mutiny of soldiers or of the population for limited ends had by definition to become a usurpation, or an attempt at such, if it were to achieve its political goals. The social elite of the state—both the narrower power elite that exercised control in Constantinople and at court, and the wider dominant elements across the empire—never challenged the principles of this system. They could not have done so, since there was no viable alternative. To push through any sort of political change, one needed to be the emperor, or at least one of his closest advisers. If that was not the case, rebellion was the only option.⁴ And since a rebellion for limited aims was for the most part out of the question, as any challenge to imperial authority was high treason, opposition tended to escalate straight from very low-level confrontations to direct challenges to imperial authority. As long as potentially oppositional forces could be kept divided, neutral, or at arm's length from a strategic perspective, then a degree of stability was maintained. If an oppositional group emerged, it had to be challenged and fragmented. Where it was able to unite, the reigning emperor was in trouble.⁵

² See, in this respect, M. Amerise, 'Monotheism and the Monarchy: The Christian Emperor and the Cult of the Sun in Eusebius of Caesarea', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 50, 2007, pp. 72–84; cf. also A. Al-Azmeh, 'Monotheistic Kingship', in *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*, eds A. Al-Azmeh and J. M. Bak, Budapest, 2004, pp. 9–29.

³ For Byzantine imperial ideology, see primarily J. A. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike*, Stuttgart, 1939; H. Hunger, *Prooimion. Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden*, Vienna, 1964; *Das byzantinische Herrscherbild*, ed. H. Hunger, Darmstadt, 1975; G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, transl. J. Birrell, Cambridge/New York, 2003; and D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330*, Cambridge/New York, 2007. Cf. also D. Nicol, 'Byzantine Political Thought', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns, Cambridge/New York, 1988, pp. 51–79; and M. T. Fögen, 'Das politische Denken der Byzantiner', in *Pipers Handbuch der politischen Ideen*, eds I. Fetscher and H. Münkler, vol. 2, Munich, 1993, pp. 41–85.

⁴ For an alternative interpretation of the ways in which people in the late Roman world deployed the vocabulary and symbolism of republican thought, and a challenge to the notion that Christianity occupied such a central role in respect both of political action and of ideology, see A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, MA/London, 2015.

⁵ See briefly A. Kazhdan, 'Usurpation', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, eds idem et al., vol. 3, Oxford/New York, 1991, pp. 2145–6. See further *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, ed. J. Wienand, Oxford/New York, 2015; J. Szidat, *Usurpator tanti nominis. Kaiser und Usurpator in der Spätantike (337–476)*, Stuttgart, 2010; E. Flaig, 'Für eine Konzeptualisierung der Usurpation im spätromischen Reich', in *Usurpationen in der Spätantike*, eds F. Paschoud and J. Szidat, Stuttgart, 1997, pp.

Naturally, not all rebellions that resulted in an attempted or successful usurpation had their causes in elite antagonism. Insurrections in Byzantium fall into several categories, but this is not the place to attempt a typology. It is, however, necessary to contextualize them in order to secure a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Oppositional movements were mediated through broader sets of ideological and cultural norms. Moreover, the motivating context for such political upheavals—power politics, social competition, or even emotional factors, such as ambition and jealousy—was interpreted and presented from a particular angle and in close connection to contemporary political or religious imperatives. In this sense, when looking for the reasons for a usurpation, we need to establish what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz might have called a thicker description of the period and the context.⁶ With this in mind, in this chapter we will briefly focus on some key issues relating to the nature of imperial legitimacy and usurpation in the later Roman and Byzantine Empire up to the eighth century.

Uninterrupted continuity in the transfer of legitimate imperial power was for the Byzantines a prerequisite for the stability of the *imperium*. When power changed hands, as it often did, it was precisely the legitimacy of the change that had to be asserted. This involved complex processes of signification in which the terms ‘tyrant’ (*tyrannos*) and ‘tyranny’ (*tyrannis*) often played an instrumental role. What we will be concerned with, therefore, is the contribution of these terms to the construction of narratives that surrounded usurpations and were designed to validate legitimacy or indicate its loss. In discussing a wide range of textual sources—histories, hagiographies, acts of church councils, and letters—we also aim at specifying the

15–34; idem, *Den Kaiser herausfordern. Die Usurpation im Römischen Reich*, Frankfurt a. M., 1992, pp. 174–207; J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Paris, 1990; and S. Elbern, *Usurpationen im spätrömischen Reich*, Bonn, 1984. Useful broader discussion of key aspects in: W. Brandes, ‘Kaiserprophetien und Hochverrat. Apokalyptische Schriften und Kaiservaticinien als Medium antikaiserlicher Propaganda’, in *Endzeiten. Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, eds idem and F. Schmieder, Berlin/New York, 2008, pp. 157–200; and A. Kaldellis, ‘How to Usurp the Throne in Byzantium: The Role of Public Opinion in Sedition and Rebellion’, in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium. Papers of the Forty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 2010*, eds D. Angelov and M. Saxby, Farnham, 2013, pp. 42–56, along with other contributions to the same volume.

⁶ Much progress has been made in this respect, especially in the study of late antique political discourse, political action, and the identity of the various groups that could act and affect imperial politics, summed up in the term ‘Akzeptanztheorie’. See in particular the detailed analysis of the Nika events in 532 in C. Gizewski, *Zur Normativität und Struktur der Verfassungsverhältnisse in der späteren römischen Kaiserzeit*, Munich, 1988 (with the review by J. F. Haldon, ‘Late Roman Society and Its Normative Structures: Some Critical Perspectives’, *Rechtshistorisches Journal*, 8, 1989, pp. 69–81); M. Meier, ‘Göttliche Kaiser und christliche Herrscher? Die christlichen Kaiser der Spätantike und ihre Stellung zu Gott’, *Das Altertum*, 48, 2003, pp. 129–60 (144–5); S. Diefenbach, ‘Frömmigkeit und Kaiserakzeptanz im frühen Byzanz’, *Saeculum*, 47, 1996, pp. 35–66 (35–7); R. Pfeilschifter, *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel: Kommunikation und Konfliktaustrag in einer spätantike Metropole*, Berlin, 2013.

extent to which the scope and use of the terms evolved in response to historical developments and mentality shifts that took place in the course of the period under consideration.⁷

Historians seem relatively clear about how the terms ‘tyrant’ and ‘tyranny’ were employed in Byzantine sources.⁸ Already in the fourth century, but especially from the fifth century onward, a ‘tyrant’ was a challenger for the throne not vested with legitimacy, a rebel who either has already lost his struggle for power or is still fighting against the legitimate ruler. Thus, Joseph Genesius refers to Thomas the Slav as a tyrant,⁹ and Patriarch Nicholas I in the early tenth century wrote a long letter to Symeon I of Bulgaria (r. 893–927) in which he made extensive use of the vocabulary of tyranny in an anguished attempt to prevent him from carrying out his plans to march against Constantinople and usurp power—‘for who does not know that God hates usurpation (*tyrannida*), and that men in all ages execrate usurpers (*tyrannous*) as general pests.’¹⁰ ‘Tyranny’ or ‘to tyrannize’ often meant simply ‘to rebel’. This is how John Malalas, for instance, uses the word on occasion.¹¹ Moreover, any foreign ruler not recognized by the legitimate emperor could be described as a tyrant. This was the case especially with rulers controlling former parts of the empire that had been lost to the Byzantines.¹²

In its most general usage, however, ‘tyranny’ designated an arbitrary, despotic, or unjust rule. As John of Damascus notes in the *Sacra Parallela*, for instance,

⁷ See M. Humphries, ‘The Tyrant’s Mask? Images of Good and Bad Rule in Julian’s Letter to the Athenians’, in *Emperor and Author: The Writings of Julian the Apostate*, eds N. Baker-Brian and S. Tougher, Swansea, 2012, pp. 75–90.

⁸ For the late Roman period, see primarily T. D. Barnes, ‘Oppressor, Persecutor, Usurper: The Meaning of “Tyrannus” in the Fourth Century’, in *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Barcinonense*, eds G. Bonamente and M. Mayer, Bari, 1996, pp. 55–65; and V. Neri, ‘L’usurpatore come tiranno nel lessico politico della tarda antichità’, in *Usurpationen in der Spätantike*, pp. 71–86. For later centuries, see M. Koutlouka, ‘La tyrannie dans la philosophie byzantine du XI^e siècle’, in *Actes du Colloque La Tyrannie, mai 1984*, Caen, 1984, pp. 51–60; and Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance*, esp. pp. 177–84.

⁹ *Iosephi Genesii Regum libri quattuor*, eds A. Lesmüller-Werner and J. Thurn, Berlin, 1978, pp. 30.12ff, 31.37ff, 32.71. On Thomas the Slav, see P. Lemerle, ‘Thomas le Slave’, *Travaux et mémoires*, 1, 1965, pp. 255–97.

¹⁰ Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, eds and trans. R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, Washington, DC, 1973, p. 29.19–21. For Symeon I, see B. Todorov, ‘The Value of Empire: Tenth-Century Bulgaria between Magyars, Pechenegs and Byzantium’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 36, 2010, pp. 312–26.

¹¹ Cf. *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, XIII.48, XVI.3, XVI.15, etc., ed. J. Thurn, Berlin/New York, 2000, pp. 271.90, 320.26, 329.9, etc.; English transl. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, et al., *The Chronicle of John Malalas: A Translation*, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 190, 221, 225, respectively.

¹² E.g. George of Pisidia, *Poemi I: Panegirici epici*, IV.347, ed. and transl. A. Pertusi, Ettal, 1959, p. 192; idem, *Encomium of Saint Anastasius the Persian*, in *Saint Anastase le Perse et l’histoire de la Palestine au début du VII^e siècle*, ed. B. Flusin, vol. 1, Paris, 1992, pp. 251.21, 257.1. Compare Theodore Syncellus, *Homily on the Siege of Constantinople*, in F. Makk, *Traduction et commentaire de l’homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626*, Szeged, 1975, pp. 82.34, 86.14 and 28, 89.14 and 19 (repr. from L. Sternbach’s edition in *Analecta Avarica*, Cracow, 1900).

'kingdoms are to be governed by just rulers, not by tyrants'.¹³ And in his *Paideia basilike*, Theophylact of Ohrid explains that tyranny is the combined effect of irregular elevation to the purple on the one hand and the ruler's improper conduct on the other:

First of all, the tyrant comes to power with violence; for it is not by the citizens that he receives the reins of power but grabs them by means of slaughter and bloodshed. As this is the prelude to his reign, he is covered in blood from the very start. And after he settles in the palace what kind of feasts does he give himself to? He surrenders to bodily pleasures and comes up with innumerable ways to afflict his subjects. He does not trust anyone and has no friends. He only makes enemies as he sees one in everyone—in the virtuous because he thinks that they hate him (indeed, the virtuous hate those who are not like them) and in the bad precisely because they are bad and share with him the same desires. His constant fear is that someone worse than him will show up and usurp power.¹⁴

Theophylact proceeds to give a detailed portrait of the tyrant, focusing on his cruelty, lust, avarice, and a broad spectrum of other vices and defects, which he juxtaposes with the qualities of the ideal prince. Byzantine monarchical discourse in general was founded on the distinction between the good qualities of a ruler and the bad, among which tyrannical behavior was frequently picked out for particular comment. The integration, in advice literature as well as in legal codes, of biblical ideas about good rulers and bad tyrants with those inherited from classical antiquity formed the basis of diachronic approaches to the relationship between rulership and the law, as well as between the ruler and his subjects.¹⁵ In this context, imperial rule is a *leitourgia*—'a service that entails responsibility for the well-being of the subjects and requires a ruler who must always watch over the administration of his realm and ensure its development on sound lines'.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is also a form

¹³ *Patrologia Graeca*, 95, col. 1396B.11–12.

¹⁴ Theophylact of Ohrid, *Discours, traités, poésies*, ed. and transl. P. Gautier, Thessaloniki, 1980, pp. 195.21–197.8. The English translation is our own.

¹⁵ See P. Schreiner, 'Das Herrscherbild in der byzantinischen Literatur des 9. bis 11. Jahrhunderts', *Saeculum*, 35, 1984, pp. 132–51; I. Čičurov, 'Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit in den byzantinischen Fürstenspiegeln des 6.–9. Jahrhunderts', in *Cupido legum*, eds L. Burgmann, M. Th. Fögen, and A. Schminck, Frankfurt a. M., 1985, pp. 33–45; G. Prinzing, 'Beobachtungen zu "integrierten" Fürstenspiegeln der Byzantiner', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 38, 1988, pp. 1–31; S. Wessel, 'The *Nouthesia* and the Law of Moses', *Byzantion*, 73, 2003, pp. 530–42. On imperial legislation, see *Ecloga. Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstantinos' V.*, ed. L. Burgmann, Frankfurt a. M., 1983, esp. pp. 3–19.

¹⁶ Michael Psellos, *Chronographie*, XLVII.2–4, ed. É. Renauld, vol. 1, Paris, 1926, p. 140; English transl. E. R. A. Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*, Baltimore, 1966, p. 179.

of *technē*. It is cemented on technical expertise and depends on the observance of certain rules and the unfailing exercise of a number of imperial virtues—above all, *philanthropia*, piety, clemency, and justice. The emperor who reigns with his own interest in mind and not that of his subjects, or exhibits criminal incompetence in handling the affairs of the state, or fails to acquire the virtues and skills that his office requires has undermined his own rule. He is a tyrant and will sooner or later suffer the consequences: loss of divine support and fall from power, to say the least.

The term ‘tyranny’, therefore, is generally set in opposition to the term *basileia*, but it is also closely related to it. As Jean-Claude Cheynet has argued, the tyrant is the negative version of the emperor, and his rule is inevitably linked to *basileia*, insofar as it is a form of imperial power, while at the same time it is opposed to it, as it involves methods and practices that are unsanctioned and highly problematic.¹⁷ Michael Psellos, for instance, points out, ‘Every emperor wants his subjects to be ruled by good laws, lest he slip inadvertently into tyranny, which is the neighbour of *basileia*’;¹⁸ and Theophylact of Ohrid, following Aristotle, lists six types of government where *tyrannis* is the antithetical pair of *monarchia* ‘which is called lawful and *basileia* because it is the basis and pillar of the people (*laos*)’.¹⁹ Within that general framework, the terms ‘tyrant’ and ‘tyranny’ designated the ruler’s loss of legitimacy, a loss that usually followed from acts damaging to the interests of those able to oppose, in one way or another, the official imperial policies. This position is put particularly sharply by Patriarch Nicholas I, who notes in a letter to Pope Anastasius III that, when an emperor is led astray by the devil, then ‘we must not obey, and must ignore his order as the impious edict of an impious man’. And further, if an emperor bids his subjects to do something that goes against divine law, then ‘we shall not obey these infamous edicts’ but may oppose them and the emperor himself. This is a clear justification for the deposition of a ‘tyrannical’ ruler and demonstrates the slippage from legitimacy into tyranny that was commented on by Psellos in the eleventh century.²⁰ And the use of the term ‘tyrant’ for emperors who had contravened God’s will is amply demonstrated by its appearance in the iconophile literature—Theodore the Studite, for example, refers to the iconoclast emperor Leo V (r. 813–820) as a

¹⁷ Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance*, p. 177.

¹⁸ *Michaelis Pselli scripta minora*, eds E. Kurtz and F. Drexler, vol. 1, Milan, 1936, p. 22.1–3. In the same spirit, the chronicler Leo the Deacon refers to the imperial palace as *ta tyrannēia* when in the hands of a political opponent of his protagonist; see *Leonis diaconi Caloënsis Historiae libri decem*, III.6, ed. C. B. Hase, Bonn, 1828, p. 45.2; English transl. A.-M. Talbot and D. F. Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, Washington, DC, 2005, p. 95 and n. 44.

¹⁹ Theophylact of Ohrid, *Discours, traités, poésies*, p. 195.9–19.

²⁰ Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 232 (318–27).

tyrant.²¹ George the Monk calls Leo III (r. 717–741) a tyrant, of course, and reserves the same characterization for Justinian II, in the course of his second reign (705–711), while also referring to Constantine V (r. 741–755) as the tyrant emperor—*tyrannos basileus*.²² By the same token, Michael Syncellus refers to Theophilos (r. 829–842) as a tyrant.²³ There are very many examples of this.

The term was, of course, subjective and context-bound: authors frequently refer to individual emperors whose policies they disapprove of as tyrants, whether or not there was at the time any popular or elite opposition to them.²⁴ Nevertheless, this subjective aspect apart, there are plenty of texts that offer support for the idea that an emperor can be legitimately opposed or removed from power if he transgresses certain key rules, and that the notions of *basileia* and usurpation are two sides of the same coin, insofar as they reinforce one another. When a usurper fails, the legitimacy of the ruler is reaffirmed; when he succeeds, he legitimizes his own rule and demonstrates through his success, which must have been willed by divine providence, the illegitimacy of his predecessor. As Rosemary Morris puts it, the question is not whether a usurper took the throne or not, since for contemporaries he clearly did; rather, the issue at stake is how convincing a case could be made for the legitimacy of the usurpation and the usurper.²⁵ Since acclamation by the people or by the army was seen as a legal authorization for an act of usurpation, the word ‘usurper’ could always be cleansed of its negative connotations, either because of the context or through subsequent rationalization and propaganda.²⁶ And yet all this must also be understood within a set of legal prescriptions about what counts as high treason. Opposition to imperial authority—whether in the guise of a pamphlet predicting the demise of a particular ruler, or by means of an armed rebellion—was a potential

²¹ *Panegyric to Theophanes the Confessor*, 11.4–7, in S. Efthymiadis, ‘Le panégyrique de S. Théophane le Confesseur par S. Théodore Stoudite (BHG 1792b)’, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 111:3–4, 1993, p. 276, where, besides being denounced as a tyrant, Leo is also called ‘the crooked snake, the inimical spirit, the nape full of arrogance, the man of perdition, the son of iniquity, the vessel of rage, the Armenian abomination, the minister of the devil, the servant and collaborator of Satan’.

²² *Georgii monachi Chronicon*, IX.29, IX.33, IX.34, ed. C. de Boor (corr. P. Wirth), vol. 2, Stuttgart, 1978, pp. 733.17, 741.17, 754.1, 760.10, 764.8.

²³ *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach*, eds P. Nikitin and V. Vasilievskij, St Petersburg, 1905, p. 32.20. See also L. Brubaker and J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): The Sources. An Annotated Survey*, Aldershot, 2001, p. 219.

²⁴ Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance*, p. 180ff. See also *Große Verschwörungen. Staatsstreich und Tyrannensturz von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. U. Schultz, Munich, 1998.

²⁵ See R. Morris, ‘Succession and Usurpation: Politics and Rhetoric in the Late Tenth Century’, in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, London, 1993, pp. 199–214 (201).

²⁶ See in general H.-G. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Munich, 1966 (repr. in idem, *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, London, 1972, no. XII).

form of treason, defined in law through the Justinianic code, punishable by death, and judged by the ruler.²⁷ The line between criticism and treason was very fine;²⁸ the line between justified deposition of a ruler and tyrannical usurpation of imperial power was just as fine and hazardous to negotiate.

In the later Roman period there are three basic criteria for the legitimacy of an emperor that recur in the sources: the manner of his election; military victories and the general success of his reign, which confirm divine approval; and the verdict of later generations, based largely on the first two criteria. Interestingly, late Roman commentators appear to have had little to say about the process of legitimizing a usurper, although legitimization could be an ongoing and dynamic process, as has been demonstrated for the reign of Constantine I, for example.²⁹ But one gains the impression that replacing a legitimate ruler—that is to say, a ruler whose elevation had been supported, in one way or another, by army, Senate, and people—nevertheless required a justification acceptable in the moral universe of the leading elements of society as well as the army or the population of Constantinople. In fact, in the fourth and fifth centuries, there are three types of argument that are put forward to legitimate usurpations. First, a dynastic connection, however tenuous, which is deployed to show that the seizure of power should be acceptable, as was the case with Procopius (r. 365–366), for example, who had usurped the throne from Valens (r. 364–378): Procopius was a relative by marriage of the emperor Julian and claimed that the latter had left the empire to him. The second argument was made from the perspective of local or regional military vested interests that were taken to reflect the interests of the empire as a whole, as with the usurpations of Magnentius (r. 350–353), Magnus Maximus (r. 383–388), or Constantine III (r. 407–411). And the third was an argument from political survival, as with Eugenius, who was compelled to resist Theodosius I (r. 379–395) when the latter refused to recognize him as successor to Valentinian II (r. 375–392).

Thus, when the empress Verina, the widow of Leo I (r. 457–474), needed to justify the replacement of the emperor Zeno (r. 474–475; 476–491) by Leontius, whom she had crowned near Tarsos, she issued in the year 481/2 an edict condemning the fallen emperor on the grounds of his ruinous avarice and declaring him to be unfit for imperial rule and henceforth deposed. As reported in one recension of the *Chronicle* of John Malalas, this document stated the following:

Aelia Verina, perpetual Augusta, to our citizens of Antioch. Know that the imperial rule is ours, and that after the death of Leo of pious memory, we chose

²⁷ See *Corpus juris civilis*, IX.8.1–6, vol. 2, ed. P. Krüger, 11th edn, Berlin, 1954, pp. 373–4.

²⁸ See Brandes, 'Kaiserprophetien und Hochverrat', pp. 157–200.

²⁹ See M. Humphries, 'From Usurper to Emperor: The Politics of Legitimation in the Age of Constantine',

as emperor Strakodisseos (or Traskalisseos), later renamed Zeno, so that the subjects and all the armies should benefit. But now, seeing that the state together with its subjects are being ruined through his avarice, we have considered it necessary to crown for you a Christian emperor, distinguished for his piety and justice, so that he may preserve the affairs of the state, pacify its enemies, and guard all its subjects according to the laws.³⁰

Leaving aside the details of the political background to these events, we may note first that Verina asserts her position as empress, through her familial relationship with the previous ruler, and in particular emphasizes the fact that it was she who had appointed Zeno. Second, she claims that Zeno had proven his unsuitability for rule as a result of his shortcomings and the effect these had on the running of the state. And third, she can present her new choice, the patrician Leontius, as an appropriate replacement on the grounds of his moral uprightness and piety, with the implication that Zeno was lacking both in virtue and in orthodoxy.

Examples can be multiplied to show that legitimacy had to be achieved through a process whereby a deposed ruler was discredited while the new ruler was shown as divinely sanctioned.³¹ The simplest equation was thus a variation on the theme: success = divine support; failure = its loss. This is clearly brought out by a passage from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Evagrius, where it is noted that, since the time of Constantine and the introduction of Christianity, no legitimate emperor has been overthrown by a tyrant, except in the cases of Julian 'the hierophant', Valens, 'who had committed so many wrongs against Christians', and Zeno, who had been deposed by Basiliscus (r. 475–476) but eventually managed to destroy his opponent and regain the throne.³² Nevertheless, Evagrius does not mention that Gratian (r. 375–383), for instance, was in every way represented as a legitimate emperor both while alive and after his death, despite having been eliminated by Magnus Maximus. This, however, reflects a particular situation, for in fact Gratian was neither universally loved nor respected, but the posthumous image of an emperor who had been overthrown leaving behind colleagues who were related by family, and who may still have been ruling, was more problematic than usual. Thus neither Theodosius I nor Valentinian II, the deposed emperor's ruling relatives, could afford to allow Gratian to be slandered. A similar situation prevailed after the overthrow of Constans (r. 337–350) by Magnentius (r. 350–353). Similarly, the official version of Valentinian

³⁰ *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, p. 314.*18–*29; *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, pp. 216–17 (and notes).

³¹ See A. Wardman, 'Usurpers and Internal Conflicts in the Fourth Century A.D.', *Historia*, 33, 1984, pp. 220–37.

³² *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia*, III.41, eds J. Bidez and L. Parmentier, London, 1898/1979, p. 144.5–14; English transl. M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, Liverpool,

II's death—probably a suicide—was that he had been done away by Eugenius and Arbogast.³³ Yet he too was presented as entirely legitimate after death. In the latter case, of course, this was in the interests of Theodosius I: in pursuing and eliminating the usurpers, he could be the avenging power who reasserted legitimate rule in the West.³⁴

The point to emphasize is that the 'tyrant' is the unsuccessful contender for the throne. In this respect, the way Eugenius and Arbogast are treated in Socrates' fifth-century *Ecclesiastical History* is characteristic:

There was in the West a grammarian called Eugenius. He taught Latin but eventually left the schools and moved to the palace, where he served as the emperor's secretary. As he was more honored than others, on account of his cultivation, he failed to handle his good luck with moderation; instead, he teamed up with Arbogast—a native of Galatia Minor, a man of a ferocious and bloodthirsty disposition, who commanded an army battalion—and declined to usurpation (*tyrannis*). They both decided to murder the emperor Valentinian by means of corrupting the eunuchs of the imperial bedchamber, who, having been tempted with promises of promotion, strangled the emperor while he was sleeping. As soon as he was informed, Eugenius assumed control of the Western parts of the empire, and behaved in the preposterous way that one would expect from a usurper (*tyrannos*).³⁵

Socrates does not explain what sort of improper behavior Eugenius engaged in as a 'tyrant', but this was surely an integral part of the period's political imaginary. What is made clear, however, is that this behavior, which in a sense is both the cause and the symptom of the attempted coup, had sealed the fate of the perpetrators. As soon as he finds out what had happened, Theodosius campaigns against them and enjoys a great, indeed miraculous, victory. When everything seemed to be going the wrong way, one of his generals was inspired by uncommon courage that enabled him to penetrate the ranks of the enemy. As if that were not enough, a furious wind that arose in response to the emperor's prayer for divine assistance turned the arrows of Eugenius' soldiers back against themselves while also propelling those of the

³³ See B. Croke, 'Arbogast and the Death of Valentinian II', *Historia*, 25, 1976, pp. 235–44.

³⁴ See H. Sivan, 'Was Theodosius I a Usurper?', *Klio*, 78, 1996, pp. 198–211; and M. R. Salzman, 'Ambrose and the Usurpation of Arbogastes and Eugenius: Reflections on Pagan-Christian Conflict Narratives', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 18, 2010, pp. 191–223.

³⁵ Cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Kirchengeschichte*, V.25.1–6, ed. G. C. Hansen, Berlin, 1995, pp. 307.25–308.6.

imperial army toward their targets. And as these marvelous occurrences determined the outcome of the battle,

the usurper threw himself at the emperor's feet and begged him to spare his life, but the soldiers beheaded him right there as he lay prostrate. . . . As to Arbogast, the agent of such evils, he did manage to escape but upon realizing, two days later, that he could not possibly survive, he killed himself with his own sword.³⁶

Deprived of legitimacy and divine support, the 'tyrants' could not but end badly. Their defeat on the battleground and the failure of the coup leave no doubt about who was in the right and who was in the wrong. Valentinian's murder was by no means justified, and the usurpers were in no position to claim the authority with which their victim had been lawfully vested. Not surprisingly, their tyrannical interlude was short-lived and effectively dealt with by Theodosius.

By the middle of the seventh century, however, it seems that a successful coup d'état or usurpation did not necessarily mean that the deposed emperor had been worse than his replacement. On occasion an emperor could be replaced by an even less competent or able ruler, the justification for which was seen in the working out of divine providence, and more particularly in God's punishment of the Romans—the Chosen People since the incarnation of Christ—for their sins. The best example of this is the overthrow of the emperor Maurice in 602 at the hands of the field army on the Danube. At the time, their march to Constantinople was to demand, among other things, an improvement in conditions of service, as well as more generous pay and more competent commanders. In the event, Maurice took fright and fled, and in the absence of any other plausible candidate, the army, followed by the population of the city and in particular by the demes, acclaimed the officer Phocas, who ruled, with varying degrees of incompetence, until his deposition in 610. Maurice's deposition was greeted as the just deserts of a tyrannical and avaricious ruler who had—according to a popular story of the time—betrayed one of his own armies to the Avars. Phocas, on the other hand, was hailed at the time as an orthodox ruler. His reign, however, was remembered, by later generations in particular, as a time of oppression, murder, and tyranny.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., V.25.15–16, p. 309.6–12.

³⁷ See in general D. M. Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation in the Seventh Century: Rhetoric and Revolution in Byzantium*, Amsterdam, 1993.

Already during the reign of Heraclius (610–641), who usurped the throne from the usurper,³⁸ Theophylact Simocatta reserved for Phocas the darkest colors in his rhetorical palette. In the *Histories* not only is he described as ‘a most cruel tyrant’ and as ‘the Centaur who most brutally ravaged the chaste purple,’³⁹ but the very moment of his proclamation is explicitly defined as a fatal mistake, despite the loud applause and general enthusiasm that accompanied it: ‘Then, as the factions were applauding the tyrant and everyone was eager for change, the evil was proclaimed, the tyrant was appointed lord of the scepters, disaster overcame prosperity, and the great and, so to speak, distinguished misfortunes of the Romans took their origin.’⁴⁰ Indeed, it was shortly thereafter that people realized what they were getting into. The previously celebrating crowds understood their folly as soon as they saw the slain bodies of Maurice and his sons floating in the sea ‘like depictions of misfortunes.’⁴¹ Even Phocas’ mutinous soldiers had to perish eventually, simply because they had laid eyes on the first fruits of their leader’s atrocities—the severed heads of the imperial family: ‘For it was necessary that the inhumane army also share in the pollution through observation, so that the evil-hating and impartial judgment of God might also net in the toils of retribution all those who had raged in this cause.’⁴² It was only after every single member of ‘that tyrant-loving and most impious mob’ had suffered a more or less gruesome death that a period of defeat and devastation finally came to an end.⁴³

By the later seventh century there was little doubt about the character of Phocas’ reign. The monk Anastasius of Sinai, for instance, took his tyrannical rule for granted and accounted for it by interpreting it as a sign of divine disapproval and retribution for the Chosen People’s misdeeds. In his *Erotapokriseis*, a collection of

³⁸ Cf. John of Antioch’s seventh-century chronicle, *Historia chronica*, frag. 218f.6, in *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, ed. C. Müller, vol. 5, Paris, 1938, p. 38, where the moment power changed hands is described in the following terms: ‘Photius, whose wife had been seduced by Phocas, stormed the palace with the army, and dragged him out pulling him from the beard. They stripped the imperial garb from him, put him on a ship, and brought him to Heraclius. Seeing him with his hands tied behind his back, Heraclius said, “You scoundrel, is this how you have ruled?” To which Phocas responded, “As if you will rule better!” Then Heraclius, sitting on horseback, kicked him away, and they beheaded him on the spot. And when they cut off his right arm and hand and genitalia, and put them on sticks, they dragged him . . . and burned him in the Bous.’

³⁹ *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, VIII.6.9, VIII.10.4, ed. C. de Boor (corr. P. Wirth), Stuttgart, 1972, pp. 295.8 and 303.3, respectively; English transl. M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, Oxford/New York, 1986, pp. 219 and 225. See also M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare*, Oxford/New York, 1988.

⁴⁰ *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, VIII.10.5, p. 303.6–10; *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, p. 225.

⁴¹ *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, VIII.12.2, p. 307.3; *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, p. 228.

⁴² *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, VIII.12.9, pp. 307.27–308.2; *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, p. 229.

⁴³ *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, VIII.12.9–11, p. 308.2–12; *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, p. 229. Cf. also the description of these events, as well as of Phocas’ ill-fated reign, in *Georgii monachi Chronicon*, IX.21, vol. 2, pp. 662–7.

questions and answers designed to offer counsel to ordinary Christians about both theological and day-to-day issues.⁴⁴ Question 65 addresses whether ‘every governor and emperor is appointed by God’. Among other things, Anastasius reports the story of a certain monk in Constantinople who, when ‘the tyrant Phocas’ became emperor and started perpetrating his atrocities, could not help complaining to God:

‘Lord, why have you made such a man emperor?’ After several days had gone by and he repeated the same thing to God, ‘Why have you made such a man emperor?’, a voice came to him from God saying, ‘Because I have not found anybody worse!’⁴⁵

Bad emperors could be imposed as a punishment, as much as they could be overthrown for their impiety or incompetence.

In the late Roman period, therefore, and at least until the end of the sixth century, the real political motives for the deposition or replacement of an emperor or the seizure of power by a usurper were regularly given a moral and on occasion exegetical garb, either at the time, as with the empress Verina’s support for Leontius, or after the event, as with this last story. On the other hand, the discourse surrounding usurpations and changes of ruler from the early seventh century onward indicates that there is a discernible evolution in the ways such events were described, explained, or justified.⁴⁶

The narratives inhering in many texts from the later sixth and seventh centuries bespeak an evolution in attitudes both to the relationship between the emperor, as God’s elect, and the Roman people, and to the ways through which access to divine

⁴⁴ For the original collection of 103 questions and answers, see M. Richard, ‘Les véritables “Questions et réponses” d’Anastase le Sinaïte’, *Bulletin de l’Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes*, 15, 1967–8, pp. 39–56 (repr. in idem, *Opera minora*, vol. 3, Turnhout/Leuven, 1977, no. 64). See also J. F. Haldon, ‘The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief’, in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. A. Cameron, vol. 1, Princeton, 1992, pp. 107–47.

⁴⁵ *Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones*, eds M. Richard and J. A. Munitiz, Turnhout/Leuven, 2006, p. 116.11–19; English translation J. A. Munitiz, *Anastasios of Sinai: Questions and Answers*, Turnhout, 2011, p. 177. It should be kept in mind, of course, that this image of Phocas was in large part a product of the propaganda of the Heraclian dynasty itself; see now M. Meier, ‘Kaiser Phocas (602–610) als Erinnerungsproblem’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 107, 2014, pp. 139–74.

⁴⁶ It would be appropriate in a broader discussion to compare east Roman with early Western medieval concepts and practices—there are considerable similarities as well as significant differences. See in general F. Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht im früheren Mittelalter. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Monarchie*, ed. R. Buchner, 2nd edn, Darmstadt, 1954; I. Wood, ‘Usurpers and Merovingian Kingship’, in *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*, eds M. Becher and J. Jarnut, Münster, 2004, pp. 15–31; M. Richter, ‘Die lange “Machtergreifung” der Karolinger. Der Staatsstreich gegen die Merowinger in den Jahren 747–771’, in *Große Verschwörung*, ed. Schultz, pp. 48–59.

counsel and intervention could be achieved. The second half of the seventh century in particular witnessed a series of shifts in perception that affected the ways individuals or groups positioned themselves vis-à-vis the emperor and asserted their capacity to respond to change or preserve the status quo. This involved attempts to make common-sense assumptions about how the world worked match with perceptions of how it was changing. It also involved stimuli to take action to maintain or restore things to the way they ought to be.⁴⁷ The issue of causation that recurs in several texts of this period, pertaining to the extent and effectiveness of human free will, and the role of ordinary human beings in the causal chain of events, was fundamental, for it meant that everyone—emperors, soldiers, clerics, and laypersons—had a vested interest in trying to work out how best to regain God's help against the enemy and how best to preserve the empire of the Christian Romans.⁴⁸ Concomitantly, military failure, and the social and economic dislocation caused by constant warfare, meant that emperors were faced with two equally daunting tasks: preserving their authority in the face of criticism, and maintaining the fiscal and military apparatuses of the state in working order.

Mid-seventh-century sources suggest that two major perspectives evolved in this situation. Explanations for the failure of Roman arms in the East had to be found, and these were based almost exclusively on a Christian eschatology in which the sins of the Chosen People, and in particular those of their leaders, occupied a central position.⁴⁹ Roman defeats could thus be attributed to the adoption and enforcing of imperial monotheletism, and Roman success to its abandonment.⁵⁰ The fate, for

⁴⁷ See J. F. Haldon, 'Ideology and Social Change in the Seventh Century: Military Discontent as a Barometer', *Klio*, 68, 1986, esp. pp. 145–54, with literature; cf. in addition A. Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, Vienna, 1960; and H. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1967, esp. pp. 1–103 and 262–83.

⁴⁸ The questions of predestination, of determinism, of the nature of free will had all been addressed by earlier generations of Christian thinkers. There is no doubt, however, that they became especially acute during the seventh century. For the general background up to the seventh century, see D. Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque. Recherches sur la survivance de l'argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles*, Leuven, 1945.

⁴⁹ See H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalypstik des 7. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. M., 1985; W. E. Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquests', *Church History*, 38, 1969, pp. 139–49. For an analysis of attitudes and beliefs in the context of the seventh-century changes, see also J. F. Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die: The Paradox of East Roman Survival, 640–740*, Cambridge, MA/London, 2016.

⁵⁰ *Sermo III adversus Monotheletas*, 1.85–1.101, in *Anastasii Sinaitae Sermones duo in constitutionem hominis secundum imaginem Dei, necnon opuscula adversus Monotheletas*, ed. K.-H. Uthemann, Turnhout/Leuven, 1985, pp. 59–61; cf. also *Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones*, p. 116, where Anastasius explicitly links God's punishment for sin to military and civil disaster. On monotheletism, the doctrine that Christ's two natures share one will, see P. Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 2014; *The Acts of the Lateran Synod of 649*, trans. R. Price, P. Boot, and C. Cubitt, Liverpool, 2014, pp. 5–108; and F. Winkelmann, *Der monenergetisch-monotheletische Streit*, Berlin, 2001.

instance, of Constans II (r. 641–668), who was murdered while taking his bath, is treated as a just punishment in several texts, such as the Greek hagiography of Pope Martin composed in the last years of Leo III's reign and based on an earlier Latin *Vita*.⁵¹ Similarly, the writer of the collection of miracles of Therapon compared the Arab invasions and conquests to the Flood of the Old Testament, incurred through the sins of the Chosen People.⁵² These assumptions are shared likewise by the *Narrationes* ascribed to Anastasius.⁵³ A close parallel was assumed between imperial orthodoxy, defined very narrowly, and the fate of the empire. Pope Martin refers quite specifically to this in his letter to the young Constans on the issue of monothelete doctrine,⁵⁴ while Sophronius of Jerusalem makes the same explicit connection in his *Synodical Letter*, addressed to Patriarch Sergius at Constantinople.⁵⁵

Explanations were couched almost entirely in terms of divine retribution,⁵⁶ although human agents were also involved on occasion: Constans II's advisers sought to explain the defeats of imperial armies by accusing both Maximus Confessor and Pope Martin of treachery—the latter because he purportedly supported the exarch Olympius' rebellion in Italy, thereby contributing to the loss of western territories;⁵⁷ the former because he was supposed to have encouraged disobedience and rebellion, as well as to have insulted the emperor and contributed to the loss of Alexandria, Tripolis, and the Pentapolis.⁵⁸ Martin was apparently refused permission during his initial interrogation to discuss issues of dogma, on the grounds that only political

⁵¹ See P. Peeters, 'Une vie grecque du pape S. Martin I', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 51, 1933, p. 262; and *Vita Maximi Confessoris*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, 90, col. 105C–D.

⁵² *Laudatio in miracula sancti hieromartyris Therapontis*, in L. Deubner, *De Incubatione capita quattuor*, Leipzig, 1900, p. 123 (§6.5f); see also J. F. Haldon, '“Tortured by My Conscience. The *Laudatio Therapontis*: A Neglected Source of the Later Seventh or Early Eighth Centuries', in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, eds H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny, Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA, 2007, pp. 264–78.

⁵³ See, for example, F. Nau, 'Le texte grec des récits utiles à l'âme d'Anastase (le Sinaïte)', *Oriens Christianus*, 3, 1903, p. 87.14–15; cf. B. Flusin, 'Démon et Sarrasins. L'auteur et le propos des *Diègēmata stèrikta* d'Anastase le Sinaïte', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11, 1991, p. 382 and n. 3.

⁵⁴ See *Ep.* 3, in *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, ed. J. D. Mansi, vol. 10, Florence, 1764, cols 789D–797B; *The Acts of the Lateran Synod of 649*, pp. 412–17.

⁵⁵ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, 2nd ser., vol. 2.2: *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum tertium*, ed. R. Riedinger, Berlin, 1992, p. 492.1–5.

⁵⁶ For a useful survey, see Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine Reactions'.

⁵⁷ Detailed account with sources in W. Brandes, '“Juristische” Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jahrhundert? Die Prozesse gegen Papst Martin I. und Maximos Homologetes', *Fontes Minores*, 10, 1998, pp. 141–212; see also Peeters, 'Une vie grecque du pape S. Martin I', p. 258, where Martin's interrogators attack him 'in a tyrannical and abusive manner' and falsely accuse him of having instigated a *tyrannis*, that is, a rebellion. For Martin's defense, see his *Ep.* 14, in *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, vol. 10, cols 849D–850E.

⁵⁸ See Maximus the Confessor, *Relatio motionis*, in *Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia*, eds P. Allen and B. Neil, Turnhout/Leuven, 1999, pp. 13–15.19–36; English transl. P. Allen and B. Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, Oxford/New York, 2002, pp. 48–51 (§§1–2). Cf. Brandes, '“Juristische” Krisenbewältigung'.

and secular matters were at issue.⁵⁹ Constans II had, naturally, a vested interest in locating an alternative reason for defeat, and there is no hint that anything other than human faults were blamed. In contrast, his son and successor, Constantine IV (r. 668–685), while not admitting openly that his father's policies were responsible, nevertheless tacitly conceded as much when he convoked the Sixth Ecumenical Council, while at the same time invoking secular troubles as a major reason for the delay in re-establishing a dialogue between the imperial party and the opposition.⁶⁰ In a letter read out at the Sixth Council, Pope Agatho clearly relates the military fortunes of the emperors to the maintenance or not of orthodoxy;⁶¹ and saints' lives take up the same theme.⁶² On the other hand, the logic of divine punishment was not limited in its applicability: the monothelete presbyter Constantine of Apamea argued at the Sixth Council that the doctrine of the single will—which for him meant orthodoxy—should be defended, since it was its abandonment that had brought about recent defeats at the hands of the Bulgars.⁶³ Monophysite texts commonly relate the military disasters of the empire in the seventh century to the Chalcedonian position of the imperial government.⁶⁴ Similar sentiments informed the decision of Philippikos to reimpose an official monotheletism as orthodox, and may even have been instrumental in attracting the support of churchmen such as Germanos, later patriarch, and Andreas of Crete.⁶⁵

This was not merely an ideological problem. As the situation developed, so individuals and groups found themselves in situations in which physical action to change things became a viable option. Public expressions of discontent with rulers, opposition to imperial policies, or to the way emperors performed in battle or in the political arena, became both more frequent and more readily justified in the radically changed political and military context of the second half of the seventh century. And this is one of the major stimuli to the coups and rebellions that took place at this time. This is not to say that there is always a direct causal link—power politics, ambition, and social competition undoubtedly are a part of the whole, but they do need to be seen in this particularly nuanced context. To be sure, this explanation

⁵⁹ Peeters, 'Une vie grecque du pape S. Martin I', p. 259.

⁶⁰ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, 2nd ser., vol. 2:1, p. 10.21ff (*sacra* to Patriarch George).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58.11–18; 62.25–64.5, 118.3–13.

⁶² See, for instance, *Vita Gregorii Agrigentini* (written in Rome c. 680–700), in *Leontios Presbyteros von Rom: Das Leben des Heiligen Gregorios von Agrigent*, ed. A. Berger, Berlin, 1995, pp. 260–64 (§§95–8).

⁶³ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, 2nd ser., vol. 2:2, p. 694.24–27.

⁶⁴ See S. P. Brock, 'Syriac Views of Emergent Islam', in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll, Carbondale/Edwardsville, 1982, pp. 9–21 and 199–203 (repr. in *idem, Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, London, 1984, no. VIII).

⁶⁵ See the remarks of H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, Munich, 1959, pp. 474, 500.

was not entirely new, since it had always informed the causal logic of the church historians. Nevertheless, it was not generalized until the later seventh century.

In this respect, the period from about 695 until 717, the so-called twenty years of anarchy,⁶⁶ is indeed characteristic. The difficulties of the situation that prevailed in the years just before the successful attempt on the throne by Leo III, and the responses these difficulties had engendered, are best summarized in the words of a contemporary, the deacon Agathon, who lived through the events of the reigns of Philippikos Bardanes (r. 711–713) and his immediate predecessors and successors:

For the frightful troubles which had come to pass one after another in the previous years as a result of our sins caused a weakening and a very great degree of destruction not only in the body of the God-guarded polity. They reached as far as the very head of the empire itself, so that at last, as a result of the frequent changes of ruler in the state brought about by tyrannous insurrections, its affairs were treated with contempt and valued at nought.⁶⁷

In Agathon's account, 'tyrannous insurrections' becomes a general marker of political unrest and strife damaging to the state. And this has been taken more or less at face value by the historiography of Byzantium—self-interested provincial armies, competition between rival armies, the assumed (but incorrectly so) uniting of civil and military powers in the hands of provincial military commanders, the concentration of masses of soldiers near Constantinople, or simply an intensified preoccupation with internal politics are all causes invoked to explain the situation. Contemporaries and later commentators put it all down to a lack of respect for authority which was rife at the time. In fact, there is more at issue here than the selfish rebellions of ignorant soldiers or the ambition of members of the elite, and we need to take into account the broader cultural context within which they occurred. This might include a number of background factors such as the changing situation of towns, the economic situation of the empire, the Arab invasions and the threat to the empire's very survival, as well as shifts in the ways people thought about their world.

When Leo, commander of the Anatolikon army, seized power in 717 to become Leo III, his was the seventh coup or usurpation since the deposition of Justinian

⁶⁶ See, for instance, W. E. Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest, 471–843: An Interpretation*, Amsterdam, 1981, pp. 186–208.

⁶⁷ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, 2nd ser., vol. 2:2, p. 898.30–35. According to Agathon's report, preserved in the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680–81, even the patriarch John VI condemned Philippikos' seizure of power as tyrannical in his letter to Pope Constantine; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 901.15–907.28. It should be noted that John, who shared Philippikos' monothelite leanings, had been appointed patriarch by the emperor himself very soon after the latter usurped the throne from Justinian II.

II in 695. But more than merely being a result of military fickleness and political instability—which in some senses they certainly were—these rebellions and coups betray a shift in the way people (soldiers and their leaders, members of the political elite at Constantinople or in the provinces, as well as the ordinary population of the empire) sought to claim a role in the political and military situation of the period. On the one hand, if Agathon's response is anything to judge by, 'tyrannous insurrections' were a symptom of a deeper evil, the sins committed by the Chosen People. On the other hand, those who were in a position to act to rectify the situation clearly felt justified in doing so. These might be generals who felt they could do better (Leontios, Tiberios, Apsimar), members of the old elite who felt injured by the policies of the current ruler (Leontios under Justinian II, Philippikos Bardanes in 711), emperors who believed that a shift in imperial religious politics was the solution (Philippikos' return to a monothelete position), or candidates who stood for the vested interests of the palatine administration and other members of the metropolitan establishment. For a short period, tyranny and usurpation were almost usual—branded, of course, both by contemporaries (Agathon) and later commentators (Theophanes the Confessor, Nicephorus I of Constantinople) as evil consequences of the situation. As the patriarch Nicephorus puts it, 'On account of the frequent assumptions of imperial power and the prevalence of usurpation, the affairs of the empire and of the City were being neglected and declined.'⁶⁸ Nevertheless, such actions were felt to be entirely justified by those involved in the events—indeed, Theophanes' account of the removal from power of Justinian II in 711, while written much later, suggests that once the main supporters of a ruler had lost faith in him, they were perfectly willing to see him removed from power.⁶⁹ None of the usurpers appears to have lacked support at the time of their coup; all except Leo III came to a sticky end. No source explicitly supports the notion of a tyrannous usurpation, yet in the later accounts of Theophanes and Nicephorus, both based on earlier and almost certainly contemporary or near-contemporary sources, the actions of the usurpers are rarely condemned outright (the mutiny of the Opsikion soldiers in 716 and their choice of emperor mark an exception).⁷⁰ Perhaps more tellingly, in the style and language of a later seventh-century account of the trials and tribulations of Maximus the Confessor, written by an avowed enemy of Constans II and all monotheletes, the

⁶⁸ Nicephorus I, *Short History*, §52, ed. and transl. C. Mango, Washington, DC, 1990, p. 120.1–3.

⁶⁹ *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, vol. 1, Leipzig, 1883, pp. 380–81; English transl. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813*, Oxford/New York, 1997, p. 529. See also Nicephorus I, *Short History*, §45, pp. 86–9.

⁷⁰ *Theophanis Chronographia*, p. 385; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, pp. 535–6. See also Nicephorus I, *Short History*, §50, pp. 117–18.

author of a commemorative polemic comes very close to encouraging the deposition of those rulers deemed to be heretical:

In the year 6118, or even a little later, after the creation of the world, when with God's consent Heraclius was emperor (it is written in the Book of Job, 'I will give a king who is *an interpreter of the people's discontent*'), and Sergius was settled on the patriarchal throne of Constantinople, the heresy of the monotheletes began to be introduced into the country, which endured for something close on sixty years. I say this because his descendants received the empire and held sway over it in succession like a *gangrenous sore*. From them descended an emperor by the name of Constantine (sc. Constans II). . . . When he too became possessed by this heresy [and] published the *Typos*, which is full of blasphemy, he posted it in the exo-narthex of the holy Great Church in Constantinople in ratification of the blasphemous heresy of the monotheletes. But he paid a just penalty: . . . intending to travel to Rome, he got as far as Sicily, and there, while he was relaxing in the baths, he received a fatal blow from the attendant, and was carried off.⁷¹

At any rate, following Leo III's seizure of power in the course of the Arab invasion and campaigns of the year 716/7, a degree of stability appears to have been established. But we should not forget that after Leo's ascent to the throne there were at least three more attempts at usurping his authority. In 717/8, the military commander in Sicily, believing probably that Constantinople had fallen, had himself declared emperor; in 719, a plot aimed to restore the deposed Anastasius II; in 726/7, the troops in Greece (the Helladic command) rebelled and sailed to attack Leo in the capital; and very shortly before this a rebellion in Italy likewise aimed to remove Leo and establish a usurper as emperor.⁷² Leo's success in defeating all these attempts has left us with the impression that the 'twenty years of anarchy' were entirely anomalous. They were not, and indeed Leo's success in holding onto his throne belies the conditions of the time and, more important, the attitudes of the time toward rulers who were thought to be failing, or were simply unpopular with a particular faction or in a particular region.

⁷¹ Theodore Spadaeus, *Hypomnesticon*, §2, in *Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia*, p. 197–20; *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions*, pp. 149–50.

⁷² For the political history of the period, see J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*, 2nd edn, Cambridge/New York, 1997, pp. 74–89; L. Brubaker and J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History*, Cambridge/New York, 2011, pp. 80–86; W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford, 1997, pp. 337–54.

Behind all this, however, there remains the question posed at the beginning of this paper: Is there any change in the value attributed to terms such as 'tyranny' or 'usurpation' between the later Roman period and the early Byzantine world? Indeed, there is. This change was to a large extent determined by a series of important developments that took place over the course of the seventh and into the eighth century, involving primarily the ever-closer relationship forged between emperor and divine choice, imperial conduct and divine support, and finally between correct belief and the fate of the Roman Empire.⁷³ This meant two things: first, that more attention was now given to the individual performance of a ruler; and second, that people felt more entitled to take action to ensure that orthodoxy, however defined, was observed and maintained. On these grounds usurpation was relatively easy to justify, and the deposition or even murder of an enthroned and divinely chosen emperor could be presented as a legitimate act intended to restore order and regain divine protection.⁷⁴ This is the view taken in later centuries, and it is different from the moral framework that was prevalent in the late Roman period. The events of the middle and late seventh century in particular were instrumental in this change.

⁷³ On these developments see A. Cameron, 'Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Constantinople', *Past and Present*, 84, 1979, pp. 3–35 (repr. in idem, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium*, London, 1981, no. XVIII); J. F. Haldon, 'The Miracles of Artemios and Contemporary Attitudes: Context and Significance', in *The Miracles of Saint Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium*, trans. J. Nesbitt and V. Crysafulli, Washington, DC, 1997, pp. 33–73; and the broader discussion in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History*, pp. 11–66.

⁷⁴ See Haldon, 'Ideology and Social Change', pp. 139–90.

Evil Lords and the Devil

TYRANTS AND TYRANNY IN CAROLINGIAN TEXTS

*Sumi Shimahara**

THE CAROLINGIAN PERIOD (middle of the eighth to the end of the ninth century CE) is of interest for the study of tyranny for two main reasons: on the one hand, it was at that point that crucial works and concepts from antiquity were intensively rehabilitated; on the other, a royal ideology emerged, which, though constantly evolving, never failed to reserve for the king a role of significant power. Nevertheless, the nature and practice of kingship were conceived within a rigid framework. There were just and unjust ways one could be a king, and the definition of these modalities became the object of numerous works written in that period. The frequency with which the term ‘tyrant’ is encountered in Carolingian sources is revealing: a simple search in two databases, the Cross Database Searchtool—Brepolis and the Patrologia Latina Database, yields 2,420 instances in the eighth and ninth centuries. To be sure, one must filter these results, as some occurrences are common in the two databases while others are wrongly attributed, especially in the Patrologia Latina Database. At the same time, however, it should be kept in mind that there is a very substantial number of unpublished Carolingian texts that surely contain invaluable evidence. In any case, there can be little doubt that the term in question was widely used in the period that concerns us here. It remains to clarify in what ways exactly.

* This chapter was translated from French by Nikos Panou.

To better illustrate the polyvalence of the term in the Carolingian period, I have divided the evidence into two groups, distinguishing the Latin Bible and its commentaries from other sources. This approach aims at comprehending the circulation of concepts and the permeability of genres by taking into account the specificities of the latter. The emphasis on the biblical corpus is dictated by the crucial importance of the Bible in the period under consideration. Christianity, which claimed to adhere to the accurate interpretation of the Bible, played an instrumental role in cementing the unity of the Carolingian empire, as it had already done for the peoples that the Pippinids had integrated into the Frankish political sphere. Inevitably, the Bible served as an authoritative point of reference that, among other things, facilitated the cultivation and promotion of ideas and ideologies in a wide range of texts. Commentaries on the Bible, some of which are addressed to sovereigns, specify the meaning that the Carolingians found in that fundamental work. That meaning was primarily of a spiritual nature, not a political one. But within that larger spiritual scope a concern for the worldly configuration of human beings also found its place. The goal of this chapter is to identify the definitions of the term 'tyrant' that were embedded in the explications of that textual matrix, the Bible, in the Carolingian period by discussing them in conjunction with those that are found in other sources. These definitions provided a background for Carolingian political thought, even if they did not necessarily constitute its backbone.

Rather than attempting to offer a definition of iniquitous kingship in the Bible and its commentaries, a vast topic to start with, I have chosen to focus on the treatment of the term *tyrannus* and the words deriving from the same root. My study of Carolingian exegesis on the Book of Daniel led to the surprising observation that the term is left practically without elaboration in the ninth-century commentaries.¹ This 'eclipse' is worth accounting for. Why and how did it occur, despite the fact that the topic of the bad king is omnipresent in the commentaries of that book as well as of several other books of the Old Testament? The examination of a more substantial textual corpus with a view to defining the term, its uses, and its connotations will provide an answer to that question.

¹ Cf. S. Shimahara, 'Daniel et les visions politiques à l'époque carolingienne: Exemple d'un usage social de la Bible', *Médiévales*, 55, 2008, pp. 19–32, and *Haymon d'Auxerre, exégète carolingien*, Turnhout, 2013. It should be mentioned that the term appears only three times in Daniel (1:3; 3:2; 3:3), which is to be expected given the book's Hellenistic context.

DEFINITIONS OF THE TYRANT IN CAROLINGIAN NORMATIVE AND
NARRATIVE SOURCES

In the absence of an exhaustive study, it would be worth making a few general observations regarding the way in which tyranny was treated in the nonexegetical sources of the Carolingian period.² Although the term was relatively common, it was almost overshadowed by an even more intense interest in defining kingship. Following Isidore of Seville, the king was *stricto sensu* perceived as he who governs well (*recte*).³ Following the Fathers, Carolingian authors such as Alcuin, Cathwulf, Jonas of Orléans, Rabanus Maurus, Sedulius Scottus, and Hincmar of Reims asserted that the principal quality of good government is obedience to God. That resulted in three recurring and intertwined injunctions. Obeying God amounts to exercising the virtues, especially justice, piety, clemency, patience, benevolence, as well as humility, which is necessary in order to acknowledge that royal power comes from God. It also entails respecting the laws, modeled on the divine precepts: 'the emperor issues the laws, which he is the first to respect,' declares Ambrose addressing Valentinian II, and later Hincmar in his treatise on the divorce of Lothar II and Teutberga.⁴ It is often argued in Carolingian texts that respect for the laws is primarily secured by a government of not one but of many, that is, by the king and his councilors, whether clerics or not.⁵ Consequently, the tyrant was perceived as a bad king, the exact opposite of the good ruler whose portrait was emphatically drawn. He falls prey to vices, especially pride, he despises the laws and prides himself on ruling alone, without seeking counsel and forgetful of the supreme model of kingship, that of Christ.⁶

² See, for instance, *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns, Cambridge/New York, 1988, esp. pp. 163, 217, 242, and M. Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, 2nd edn, Paris, 2013, pp. 238–43.

³ For Isidore of Seville, see the chapter by Cary J. Nederman in this volume.

⁴ Ambrose, *Epistula* 75 (Maur. 21), 9, in *Sancti Ambrosii Opera. Pars X: Epistularum liber decimus, Epistulae extra collectionem, Gesta concili Aquileiensis*, ed. M. Zelzer, Vienna, 1982, p. 77; Hincmar, *De divortio Lotharii regis et Teutbergae reginae*, 5, *responsio*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Concilia*, vol. 4:1, ed. L. Böhringer, Hannover, 1992, pp. 244–5. Cf. also Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide*, p. 240.

⁵ This is also the case in Article 10 of Louis the Pious' 817 *Ordinatio imperii*: if one of the brothers lapses into tyranny, it is expected that the other two will warn him, urge him to return to the right path, or even castigate him; cf. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 1, ed. A. Boretius, Hannover, 1883, p. 272. In this the Carolingians follow the Roman tradition; cf. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, p. 163, and Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide*, pp. 238–43.

⁶ See, for instance, Hincmar, *De cavendis vitiis et virtutibus exercendis*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 16, ed. D. Nachtmann, Munich, 1998, pp. 140–41; cf., in contrast, the virtues of the king in Sedulius Scottus, *Liber de rectoribus christianis*, in *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters*, vol. 1:1, ed. S. Hellmann, Munich, 1906, p. 26.

He spreads disorder, provokes scandals, breaks human treaties, and, according to Paschasius Radbertus, goes as far as to subvert the order of day and night.⁷ Still, it is God who appoints the tyrant, if only to inflict punishment on the subjects, while good kings are sent to those who deserve divine encouragement.

A good example of a text that provides a definition of tyranny on the basis of biblical quotes is Rabanus Maurus' *De universo*. Although heavily dependent on Isidore of Seville's *De natura rerum*, it is nonetheless an encyclopedia that reflects the scope of scholarly interests in the ninth century, bearing the compilatory character that is typical of the genre and attempting to establish a sense of global scale for each entry. Rabanus sets out to define kingship and tyranny in Chapter III of Book XVI, titled 'De regnis et militiae vocabulis'.⁸ In accordance with the structure he reserves for every chapter, the author starts by presenting a literal, 'worldly', definition of the terms within the lexical field and then proceeds to discuss them on a spiritual level, practicing in a sense what today would be called semantics. In the first part he explains that the king is he who reigns, that is, he who puts things right. He obtains the royal title by acting with righteousness, and loses it when he sins. His principal virtues are justice and piety. It is pointed out, however, that *rex*, the Latin word for king, was precisely equivalent to the Greek *tyrannos*, and that for the ancients the two terms were synonymous. Like Isidore of Seville, Rabanus cites the Old Latin version of Proverbs 8:15, which gives *tyranni* where the Vulgate gives *potentes*.⁹ He then proceeds to clarify that the meaning of the term had in the meantime evolved and that the word *tyrannus* was commonly used for particularly bad kings, rulers who govern over their subjects in an excessive and overly cruel way:¹⁰

Tyrants in Greek are the same as kings in Latin. Among the ancients there was no difference between the two, as in (Virgil *Aen.* 7.366) 'For me, part of peace will be to have touched the right hand of the tyrant.' Strong kings are called *tyranni*, for a *tiro* is 'strong'. About such, the Lord speaks, saying, 'Through me, kings reign and tyrants, through me, hold land.' Later, it happened that the worst, unjust kings were called tyrants. Against the people, they indulged their desire of excessive mastery and practiced very cruel domination.¹¹

⁷ *Radbert's Epitaphium Arsenii*, II.7, ed. E. Dümmler, Berlin, 1900, pp. 67–8.

⁸ Rabanus Maurus, *De universo*, in *Patrologia Latina*, III, cols 445B–451C.

⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 446BC. The citation is interesting as it is decidedly favorable to holders of worldly power. Wisdom speaks and declares: 'Per me reges regnant, et tyranni obtinent terram.' This is by no means a neutral use of the term. On the contrary, it has clearly positive connotations. For the Old Latin Bible, see *Bibliorum sacrorum latinae versiones antiquae*, ed. P. Sabatier, vol. 2, Reims, 1743, p. 309.

¹⁰ The semantic evolution that Rabanus comments on, as Augustine and Isidore of Seville had done before him, is a point that is often repeated in Carolingian councils; cf. *infra*, n. 27.

¹¹ *De universo*, col. 446C; English transl. P. Troop, *HRabanus Maurus, De Universo: The Peculiar Properties of*

And if the commentator does not dedicate more than two lines to the negative meaning of tyrant in the literal sense, the spiritual definitions he offers in that chapter demonstrate what exactly that meaning entailed for him. He starts by pointing out that the true king is God, with the Church as queen, and that, mystically, kings can also mean the apostles and other holy men—or even nations, in certain contexts.¹² He ends by briefly focusing on a negative meaning of ‘king’, citing in that respect an overtly unfavorable biblical passage (Hosea 8:4), and by associating ‘tyrant’ with the archenemies of God and of everything that is good. Agents of evil and hungry for terrestrial power, tyrants are determined oppressors, completely detached from a moderate, prudent, and morally acceptable kind of life:

‘Kings’ are understood as wicked teachers, as in this passage of the prophet ‘They will reign, but not by me.’ ‘Tyrant’ can allegorically represent the devil or the anti-Christ (who always endeavor to work against the rule of Christ) and perverse humans who (chasing after worldly greed) follow them. They chose to cruelly oppress the Christian people, rather than to rule with restrained disposition and to lead with due consideration.¹³

This passage combines tropology and moral explication, spirit and letter. The latter seeks to determine what is good and what is bad. In this case, it concerns those who rule in an iniquitous way. On the other hand, tropology resorts to a spiritual interpretation by connecting these rulers to the devil and the anti-Christ. It thus generates a hermeneutic rupture that Gilbert Dahan has called a ‘hermeneutic leap’.¹⁴ In the Middle Ages, spiritual exegesis did not cancel out literal explication; on the contrary, it complemented it. Above all, it involved a ‘different level of reality’ that concerned another temporality and was disengaged from that of the biblical narrative.¹⁵ The various spiritual meanings were made to relate to various times, by means of an analogy that rested on faith. Christological exegesis associates the narrative with that of the life of Christ, allegorical explanation relates it to the life of the Church, tropology establishes a parallel with the life of the soul of each

¹² *De universo*, cols 446C–447B.

¹³ *Ibid.*; *Hrabanus Maurus, De Universo*, p. 146. See also the gloss on ‘prudence’ (*tyranno’ diabolo*) in *Glossemata de Prudentio*, edited from the Paris and Vatican Manuscripts, ed. J. Burnam, Cincinnati, 1905, p. 92. On the authorship of these glosses, see H. Silvestre, ‘Jean Scot Érigène, commentateur de Prudence’, *Scriptorium*, 10, 1956, pp. 90–92; M. Cappuyns, ‘Jean Scot Érigène, commentateur de Prudence’, *Bulletin de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 7, 1957, p. 657, n. 2511; S. O’Sullivan, *Early Medieval Glosses on Prudentius’ Psychomachia: The Weitz Tradition*, Leiden, 2004, pp. 26–7.

¹⁴ G. Dahan, *L’exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval, xii^e–xiv^e s.*, Paris, 1999, esp. pp. 435–44.

believer, and analogy makes the connection between each narrative and eschatological concerns.¹⁶ In this sense, those who rule badly are perceived as the devil or his synonym, the anti-Christ, he who rebels against Christ. In the soul of each person, the tyrant is the equivalent of the devil while in the hermeneutic register, he is potentially present in every human being, and permanently so. To schematize what Rabanus argues, the king is bound to God by a distinct vertical relationship, and is also surrounded, through horizontal bonds, by counselors who ensure that he respects law and morality and conforms to the divine precepts. The tyrant, on the other hand, puts himself in a vertical relationship with other people. His power is absolute, and he rejects God.

The Carolingian period also witnessed a revitalized interest in the genre of mirrors for princes, treatises on the ideal royal conduct. The mirror that Jonas of Orléans composed for King Pippin I of Aquitaine, probably in 831, is of special interest as it has close affinities with the acts of the Council of Paris, held in 829, which the bishop had attended.¹⁷ Chapters III to VII of the *De institutione regia* focus on the nature and practice of royal power. Chapter III starts with a distinction between king, who governs justly, and tyrant, who rules iniquitously, although Jonas proceeds to clarify that the ancients used to call all the kings tyrants and that the distinction he makes is a fairly recent one,¹⁸ a remark that, as with Rabanus, is borrowed from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*.¹⁹ He then goes on to enumerate the essential qualities of the king, and by implication the corresponding shortcomings of the tyrant,²⁰ drawing on a long series of biblical quotes, mainly from Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Kings.²¹ This culminates in Chapter VI, where Jonas focuses on justice. At the end of the chapter the author asserts that,

... piety, justice, and clemency consolidate the kingdom, while wrongs against widows and orphans, unjust accusations against the wretched, cruel judgments and the corruption of justice, evidently bring it to ruin. Hence the collapse

¹⁶ See H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, vol. 2, Paris, 1993, pp. 553–7.

¹⁷ Jonas of Orléans, *Le métier de roi (De institutione regia)*, ed. and transl. A. Dubreucq, Paris, 1995; see also Y. Sassiér, *Royauté et idéologie au Moyen Âge. Bas Empire, monde franc, France (iv^e–xii^e s.)*, Paris, 2002, pp. 144–9.

¹⁸ Jonas of Orléans, *Le métier de roi*, pp. 184–5.

¹⁹ See *Etymologiae*, I.29.3, IX.3.4–6, IX.3.19–20, in *Patrologia Latina*, 82, cols 105C, 342AB, 344AB, respectively; English transl. S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and O. Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge/New York, 2006, pp. 55, 200, 201.

²⁰ 'Tyranny', however, is mentioned explicitly only once, in Chapter V, and that not in relation to royal conduct but as something that should be avoided by 'those who, after the king, have the duty to govern the people of God', that is, the aristocrats and the king's associates.

²¹ See Jonas of Orléans, *Le métier de roi*, esp. pp. 103–106 of the introduction, and the scriptural apparatus of the chapters concerned.

of several kingdoms that are not grounded in piety, justice, and equity, which clearly demonstrates the true nature of those who are in charge.²²

The list of virtues and vices in *De institutione regia* replicates that of Rabanus in *De universo*. Albeit in multiple variants, we find the same definition of the tyrant as ‘a bad ruler’ in several sources, such as Article 10 of the *Ordinatio imperii*, the treatise on virtues and vices of Hincmar of Reims, or the tract on the divorce of Lothair II, where virtues/vices and law/abuse are discussed in tandem.²³

The normative sources of the period repeat frequently these definitions of ‘king’ and ‘tyrant’ and remark on the common origin of the terms, steadily following Isidore, who is occasionally mentioned by name. This is the case, for instance, when it comes to the grammatical norm. Alcuin, Clement Scotus, and the commentary on Donatus known as *Ars Laureshamensis* cite as examples of difference (*differentia*) the moderation of the king on the one hand, and the cruelty of the tyrant on the other.²⁴ Though reformulating them, they draw from two passages in Isidore’s *Etymologies* that focus on grammar (I.31) and rhetoric/dialectics (II.29) and themselves are borrowed from Marius Victorinus’ *De definitionibus*.²⁵ Sedulius Scottus does the same thing, in yet another formulation, when he refers to words whose connotations, usage, and meaning change:

For Greeks the word tyrant was understood in a positive way. He is the king, as in Virgil: ‘and it is useful to have touched the king’s right hand’. For the Romans, on the other hand, it is used in a pejorative way: it denotes the usurper of another person’s wealth.²⁶

²² Ibid., pp. 214–15.

²³ Hincmar, *De cavendis vitiis et virtutibus exercendis*, I.3, esp. pp. 140–41; and idem, *De diuortio Hlotarii regis*, esp. pp. 108, 224, 248, 258. For the *Ordinatio imperii*, see n. 5 above.

²⁴ ‘Differentia est distinctio duarum rerum cum interpretatione, ut rex dicitur, quia modestus est, tyrannus, quia crudelis est.’ This phrase is identical in the three works: see Alcuin, *Ars grammatica*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 101, col. 858C; *Ars Laureshamensis. Expositio in Donatum maiorem*, ed. B. Löfstedt, Turnhout, 1977, p. 5; *Clementis Ars grammatica*, ed. J. Tolkiehn, Leipzig, 1928, p. 13. It should be noted that Clement Scotus, a grammarian in the court of Charlemagne and subsequently of Louis the Pious, dedicated his grammatical work to Lothair, his old student; see M. Cappuyns, ‘Clément Scot’, in *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, vol. 12, Paris, 1953, col. 1430.

²⁵ See *Etymologiae*, I.31, II.29.7, in *Patrologia Latina*, 82, cols 106B, 149D; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, pp. 55, 85. Cf. Marius Victorinus, *De definitionibus*, in *Tulliana et Mario-Victoriniana*, ed. T. Stangl, Munich, 1888, pp. 17–48 (21).

²⁶ Sedulius Scottus, *In Donati artem maiorem*, ed. B. Löfstedt, Turnhout, 1977, p. 90. Sedulius’ ‘atque iuuat dextram tetigisse tyranni’ is a variation on *Aeneid* 7.266, ‘pars mihi pacis erit dextram tetigisse tyranni’. Naturally, Virgil is not a Greek author, but in the verse following the one that Sedulius quotes, he does use *rex* as a synonym of *tyrannus*, referring in both cases to Aeneas; cf. *Aeneid* 7.267.

Conciliar documents also define the tyrant in juxtaposition to the king in passages that discuss the royal person, especially with regard to Louis the Pious, in the light of the definition put forth in *Etymologies* I.29 and IX.3.²⁷ Such antithetical definitions are occasionally found in other sources as well.²⁸

In general, the tyrant is he who borders on abuse and illegitimacy. The canonical collection that Pope Hadrian I sent to Angilram of Metz makes a clear distinction between *potestas tyrannica* and *canonica auctoritas*.²⁹ In his *Commentaria in regulam Sancti Benedicti*, Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel also defines tyranny as iniquitous power, motivated by pride, and cautions the abbots against such possible deviance, foregrounding instead the model of the good shepherd:

Strictly speaking a tyrant is one who rules in a state without the right to do so. Therefore, every proud man in his own particular way exercises tyranny. Tyranny is a Greek word meaning 'unjust usurpation of kingship', honor that is not due, unjust power, proud behavior, an inequitable ordering of affairs proceeding from a swollen mind and a proud heart. The abbot has not undertaken this ministry to exercise it over healthy souls, that is, over strong and good-living monks, but it is over weak souls, which have not yet become strong enough to bear bravely the sufferings and temptations of the world, that he has received the care of curing and healing.³⁰

USE OF THE TERMS TYRANT AND TYRANNY

Terms derived from the root *tyran-* are generally used pejoratively in a broad spectrum of texts—hagiographies, letters, annals, and chronicles—to indicate either an abusive or a foreign rule, or even both at the same time. They are used for ancient rulers, such as Phalaris in Frechulf of Lisieux,³¹ or for the persecutors of martyrs in

²⁷ See the 829 *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum Imperatorem Relatio*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 2, eds A. Boretius and V. Krause, Hannover, 1897, p. 46; the council of Paris in 829, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Concilia*, vol. 2:2, ed. A. Werminghoff, Hannover, 1908, p. 649 (II.1); and the council of Aix-la-Chapelle in 836, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Concilia*, vol. 2:2, p. 715 (III.1).

²⁸ See, for instance, Alcuin's *Ep.* 300, addressed to Aedilburge, Offa of Mercia's daughter, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, vol. 4, ed. E. Dümmmler, Berlin, 1895, pp. 458–9.

²⁹ *Capitula ab Adriano papa Ingilramno tradita*, XXVII, in *Patrologia Latina*, 96, col. 1062A. The expression 'tyrannica auctoritas', however, is attested, for instance, in Amalarius of Metz (*Forma institutionis canonicorum et sanctimonialium*, I.9, in *Patrologia Latina*, 105, col. 829BC) and in Rabanus Maurus (*De clericorum institutione*, I.4, in *Patrologia Latina*, 107, col. 300BC).

³⁰ See *Patrologia Latina*, 102, cols 853D–854A; English transl. D. Barry, *Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel: Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, Kalamazoo, MI, 2007, pp. 364–5.

³¹ See *Historiarum libri XII*, I.3.11, in *Frechulfi Lexoviensis Episcopi Opera Omnia*, ed. M. I. Allen, vol. 2, Turnhout, 2002, p. 156. This is only one of several cases referred to by Frechulf, who resorts to terms derived from the root

Rabanus Maurus' *Martyrologium*, but also for more recent cases, as in Adrevald of Fleury's Gothic and Lombard kings.³²

In the *Annales Fuldenses* the root *tyran-* is used twenty times to describe the power of the Carolingian king's enemies, such as Widukind in 778. It is also employed for those who enter into conflict with the sovereign, such as Bernard of Italy in 817, Charles the Bald in 853, and several others thereafter.³³ The terms 'tyrant' and 'tyranny' serve as historiographical modalities designed to assess the contenders and denounce the enemy, a common practice already in antiquity, when portraying an emperor as a tyrant was tantamount to condemning him. Other historical texts that make such targeted use of the terms are the *Annales Laureshamenses*, the *Annales regni Francorum*, the *Annales Bertiniani*, the *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* by the so-called Astronomer, Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni*, the *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris* by Ermoldus Nigellus, the fragmentary *Gesta abbatum Fontanellensium*, the *Chronicon Moissiacense*, the *Gesta Aldrici Cenomannicae urbis episcopi*, and Nithard's *Historiae*, to which one can add hagiographical texts such as the *Vita Chrodegangi episcopi Mettensis*. Starting in the reign of Louis the Pious, capitularies and acts of councils also make use of the root *tyran-*,³⁴ as does Sedulius Scottus in his verse praises addressed to Charles the Bald or Eberhard of Friuli.³⁵

It must be pointed out, however, that this use of the term with a view to stigmatizing an opponent is also encountered in Pope Hadrian II, who applies it four times to Patriarch Photius of Constantinople,³⁶ while two capitularies from 802 apply it potentially to church dignitaries—bishops, abbots, and prelates.³⁷ Amalarius of

tyran- seventy one times in the specific work. The same kind of usage can be found in various historical works by Paul the Deacon. See also Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Glossemata de Prudentio*, p. 69.

³² See Adrevald of Fleury, *Miracula Sancti Benedicti*, §§1 and 14, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, vol. 15:1, ed. O. Holder-Egger, Hannover, 1887, pp. 478 and 483.

³³ *Annales Fuldenses*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, vol. 7, eds G. H. Pertz and F. Kurze, Hannover, 1891, pp. 9, 20, and 43–4.

³⁴ The *tyranni* denounced in 828 in the *Epistola generalis* of Louis the Pious and Lothair, for instance, are scandalous rebels who undermine the peace and unity of the empire. See *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 2, p. 4.

³⁵ Sedulius Scottus, *Carmina* 14 and 39, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Poetae latini medii aevi*, vol. 3, ed. L. Traube, Berlin, 1896, pp. 182 and 203.

³⁶ See *Epp.* 39 and 40, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, vol. 6, ed. E. Perels, Berlin, 1925, pp. 751, 752, 758. Nicholas I had already used the expression with regard to the deposition of Ignatius, as well as in a number of other contexts; see *Epp.* 88 and 98, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, vol. 6, pp. 483 and 554.

³⁷ *Capitulum missorum generale*, 33.11, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 1, p. 93; and *Capitula de examinandis ecclesiasticis*, 38.7, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 1, p. 110.

Metz argues that an episcopal ordination must be carried out not by one bishop only but by many to avoid any possibility of tyranny, understood here as singular authority as opposed to collective jurisdiction.³⁸ Moreover, those who are denounced as tyrants in the decrees of Pippin and then Charlemagne are potential extorters among the king's agents, namely, those who attempt to overstep their authority by violating, for instance, the immunity of beneficiary establishments.³⁹ Tyranny, therefore, is defined as abusive exercise of power no matter where it comes from: it could be royal or not, lay or clerical.

To conclude, the root *tyran-*, as used in a wide range of Carolingian texts, signifies a bad rule, by the king himself, by his agents, occasionally by a church official, or, in the historical narratives, by a political adversary. What makes that rule bad is that it disrespects the law, resorts to abusive and immoral practices, and is cemented on arrogance and vice: observance of the law and virtuous conduct were often associated during this period. Thus, the term served to denounce iniquity, as a way to write history as much as to justify a mode of government. But how were the words derived from the root *tyran-* used in the Bible, that fundamental text invested with both a narrative and a prescriptive function?

THE ROOT *TYRAN-* IN THE VULGATE

The version of the Bible called Vulgate by the Council of Trent became in reality a de facto point of reference in the Carolingian period. It is, therefore, this text that will serve as a focal point in the following survey, which should ultimately be completed with a study of the numerous old Latin versions, less known and less easily accessible through the existing databases.⁴⁰ In the Vulgate the term 'tyrant' appears eighteen times, always in the Old Testament, and twice as a proper name (2 Maccabees 4:40, and Acts 19:9); the latter are excluded from consideration here.⁴¹ As in antiquity, its meaning is not necessarily negative; on the contrary, it is neutral in twelve instances that represent 67 percent of the cases, to the extent, of course, that one can talk

³⁸ *Forma institutionis canonicorum et sanctimonialium*, I.9.

³⁹ See, for instance, the decree of immunity that King Pippin issued for the Abbey of Clairac, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Diplomata Karolinorum*, vol. 1, eds E. Mühlbacher, A. Dopsch, J. Lechner, and M. Tangl, Hannover, 1906, p. 54 (no. 38).

⁴⁰ Although the Vulgate became the standard version in the ninth century, it did not eradicate the old Latin lessons: indeed, the latter can be traced in various works of the period, if only indirectly, that is, though its presence in patristic texts that represented fundamental sources for Carolingian thought. The definition of tyranny by Rabanus Maurus in *De universo* is a characteristic example in this respect.

⁴¹ Statistics are drawn from the Cross Latina Database and verified in the *editio minor* of the Vulgate, *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, eds R. Weber and R. Gryson, 4th edn, Stuttgart, 1994.

about neutrality when it comes to terms related to worldly power in the Bible. It should be pointed out that the connotations of the term are left undefined. Thus, it is the context that actually devaluates the power of the tyrant, as well as that of the king, emphasizing their insignificance when compared with the power of God, regardless of the nature of their rule.⁴² Occasionally, 'tyrant' is explicitly used for a bad ruler, although it is invariably difficult to know whether this is purely circumstantial or not.⁴³ But can one argue that this is enough to determine the term's scope in an intrinsic way? Would it not be possible to find in its place the word 'king', especially since the latter is often evaluated negatively in the Bible? It is not easy to answer. This is in fact similar to the way rulers were assessed in the high Middle Ages in Western Europe: more than anything else, it had to do with actions and context, and not so much with the nature of their rule per se.⁴⁴

Finally, the term is used for foreign rulers.⁴⁵ A tyrant can be someone who rules over a people other than that of Israel, or, in some cases, the leader of a people who has subjected the Jews. This is so in several of the passages mentioned above.⁴⁶ The books of the Maccabees are also characteristic in this respect, which is only to be expected, since they were designed to warn against the potential loss of Jewish identity, especially under Greek influence, and to enhance the distinction between Jews and non-Jews.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, 'tyrant' can be applied to Jews as well,⁴⁸ although it should be kept in mind that the famous passages that denounce kingship among the Jews do not use the term in question, preferring instead *rex* and *princeps*.⁴⁹ Moreover, in nine out of eighteen instances the term is used not for a ruler but for a high-ranking official, a dignitary, a governor, or a prince.⁵⁰ The tyrant is above all a holder of power—whether a king or not is of secondary importance or even of no interest at all.⁵¹ Even in cases where *rex* and *tyrannus* are found together, it is more of an accumulation of synonyms than a clear juxtaposition.⁵² Once again, though, the precise

⁴² Cf. Esther 6:9; Job 15:20 and 34:19; Ecclesiastes 11:5; Wisdom 12:14; Daniel 1:3, 3:2, and 3:3; Ezekiel 23:23; Habakkuk 1:10; 1 Maccabees 1:5; 2 Maccabees 5:8.

⁴³ Cf. Job 35:9; Wisdom 14:16 and 16:4; 3 Kings 16:20; 2 Maccabees 4:25 and 7:27.

⁴⁴ See E. Peters, *The Shadow King: Rex inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature, 751–1327*, New Haven/London, 1970, esp. p. 18.

⁴⁵ Cf. Jennie Grillo's discussion in this volume on the foreignness of tyranny in the Hebrew Bible.

⁴⁶ Cf. Daniel 3:2; 3:3; Ezekiel 23:23; Wisdom 16:4. In the latter case, those who exercise tyranny are the enemies of Israel. Cf. also Wisdom 15:14–15.

⁴⁷ Cf. 2 Maccabees 4:25; 5:8; 7:27.

⁴⁸ Cf. Daniel 1:3; 3 Kings 16:20.

⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Samuel 8; Hosea 8:4; 8:10; 10:3.

⁵⁰ Cf. Esther 6:9; Job 34:19; 35:9; Daniel 1:3 (the plural *tyrannorum* after the adjective *regius* suggests that *tyranni* refers here to the aristocrats); 3:2; 3:3; Ezekiel 23:23; Habakkuk 1:10; 1 Maccabees 1:5.

⁵¹ Cf. Ecclesiastes 11:5–6.

⁵² Cf. Wisdom 12:14; Habakkuk 1:10.

definition of the term is often impossible. It can have neutral, and sometimes negative, connotations. There is, however, no example of a purely positive use. That is reserved only for 'king'.

THE ROOT *TYRAN-* IN CAROLINGIAN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

The Cross Database Searchtool—Brepolis and the Patrologia Latina Database record 146 instances, 74 of which are found in commentaries on twenty-one books of the Old Testament, with the remaining 72 from commentaries on three books of the New Testament (Matthew, the Pauline Epistles, and Apocalypse), as well as in homilies on the Gospels and the Epistles. Certain mentions are less significant as they are contained in quoted biblical passages without any elaboration. Most of the occurrences, however, are found in the commentaries themselves and testify to the significance of the term in the period. The three commentators who make the most extensive use of terms derived from the root *tyran-* are Rabanus Maurus (57 instances), Haimo of Auxerre (18), and Florus of Lyon (12).⁵³ The numbers partly reflect the exegetical production of each author. Rabanus was the most prolific commentator of the Carolingian period, both in terms of the number of books he focused on and in terms of the scale of his treatises. The nature of the source texts themselves also plays a role. Once again, Rabanus wrote commentaries on a large number of historical works and resorted to the term 'tyrant' to describe certain rulers who are mentioned therein.

Sedulius Scottus was the only one, in his florilegium on the Epistle to the Romans, to give an etymological explanation of the proper name Tyrannus (*Tiranni, continentes*), which he drew from Jerome's *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* (*Tyranni: continentis eos uel confortantis eos*).⁵⁴ The person in question appears only in the Acts of the Apostles: he offered protection and comfort to Paul in his capacity as director of a school in Ephesus where the apostle took refuge to preach to his disciples. Although it is clear that the Carolingians distinguished *tyrannus* from *Tyrannus*, it is equally surprising that the etymology offered by Jerome was not as influential as one would expect, especially when the number of commentaries on Paul's Epistle to the Romans is taken into account. This passage from the Acts of the Apostles could surely have been brought up in the context of a literal explanation.

⁵³ It should be pointed out that other authors, like Sedulius Scottus, make extensive use of the root but in works that are not biblical commentaries.

⁵⁴ See, respectively, Sedulius Scottus, *Collectaneum in epistolam beati Pauli ad Romanos*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 103, col. 128C, and Jerome, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, in *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera*, ed. P. de Lagarde, vol. 1, Turnhout, 1959.

Though well attested in the Vulgate, the neutral use of the term *tyran-* is extremely rare in Carolingian exegetical texts. There is only one occasion, in Rabanus Maurus' commentary on Leviticus, where it means supreme authority or sovereign power:

When Moses and Aaron—that is, the law and the prophets who prefigure it, for it is said that Aaron, the mouth of Moses who prefigures the Law, is a prophet—arrived among the nations, it was through them that God sent His spirit to those who rule over the nations (*tyrannidem obtinentes in gentibus*), that is, the Canaanites.⁵⁵

In general, the term bears very negative connotations in the Carolingian period. In the exegetical corpus studied here, there are seven instances that echo Isidore of Seville's definition of the tyrant as the opposite of the king. Only one text, however, rehabilitates the Isidorean formulation in a way similar to that of Jonas of Orléans. This is a gloss on Daniel 1:3 from an anonymous and unpublished commentary on that book:

On the stock of tyrants, that is, of kings. Indeed, in antiquity kings were called tyrants. That changed subsequently so that the mild and good rulers came to be called kings, while the cruel and inhuman ones were called tyrants.⁵⁶

Christian of Stavelot employs political vocabulary to place the king on the side of order and the tyrant on the side of disorder, while Florus of Lyon differentiates them on the basis of the legitimacy of their rule.⁵⁷ Often the distinctive difference between king and tyrant is of a moral nature, primarily with an emphasis on justice. Ambrose Autpert is characteristic in this respect,⁵⁸ while Rabanus Maurus also contrasts the 'noble and just king' with the 'iniquitous tyrant'.⁵⁹ In essence, it is morality, the difference between good and evil, that serves as a platform for the 'hermeneutic leap' from literal, historical exegesis to a spiritual one, tropology in particular. Carolingian

⁵⁵ Rabanus Maurus, *Expositiones in Leviticum*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 108, col. 399BC (Leviticus 8).

⁵⁶ The version translated here is from an eleventh-century manuscript, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 3704, f. 166^v–170^v. It is also preserved in a tenth-century manuscript, Paris, BnF, N.A.L. 762, 125^v–128^r. The paternity of the text remains highly ambiguous.

⁵⁷ Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, ed. R. B. C. Huyghens, Turnhout, 2008, p. 382 (Genesis 21); Florus of Lyon, *Dicta Gregorii Nazianzeni*, 8 (*Ep. ad Romanos*), in *Flori Lugdunensis Opera omnia*, eds P.-I. Fransen and B. Coppieters 't Wallant, Turnhout, vol. 3:3, 2007, p. 51.

⁵⁸ Ambrose Autpert, *Expositionis in Apocalypsin*, in *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, ed. R. Weber, vol. 1, Turnhout, 1975, p. 201 (Apocalypse 3:21).

⁵⁹ See *Enarrationes in epistolas beati Pauli*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 111, col. 1395B (Romans 6:8–10).

political thought is permeated with this kind of moralism.⁶⁰ This explains how the same person can shift from being a king to becoming a tyrant, as in the case of Saul when he disobeyed God, according to Rabanus Maurus.⁶¹

Biblical exegesis is indicative of the polyvalence that moral and political vocabulary related to the root *tyran-* had acquired in the Carolingian period. Any classification of the occurrences according to the type of interpretation would prove to be inadequate. If it is more or less possible to distinguish between historical (83) and spiritual (60) uses, it is much more difficult to be precise when attempting to differentiate between moral/literal and spiritual ones. The majority of occurrences are invested with multiple nuances. On the level of literal explanation, the term is quite often attached to ‘historical’ rulers. Those rulers could be ancient, such as Nemrod, regarded as the first tyrant;⁶² pagan and wicked, such as Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, Herodes, and Maxentius;⁶³ impious and/or criminal, such as Athaliah;⁶⁴ or even persecutors of martyrs and unrepentant tempters. As Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel puts it in a homily on 1 Peter 3:8–15:

According to Salomon, the holy Church has *an army arrayed for battle* (Song 6:3), which neither the tyrants and persecutors nor their prototype, the devil, can defeat. For as it is Christ who protects it, persecutions cannot break the martyrs, carnal pleasure cannot get hold of the virgins, nor greed of the merciful, and the ambition of temporal glory cannot triumph over the humble.⁶⁵

The commentary here is moral and literal, even though it is generic and treats the camps of Christ and the devil—that is, those who follow one or the other—in a rather abstract way and without making any reference to specific rulers.

In fact, the term ‘tyranny’ is occasionally employed simply to reinforce the negative qualification of a rule, indeed, as synonymous with violence. Haimo of Auxerre comments thus on Isaiah 27:4, a passage where God declares that although merciful, He will punish those who hurt and provoke Him:

*Who will give me [thorns], that is, who will make me harsh, cruel, severe? Who will force me to be a tyrant, to the point of launching battle against you?*⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Y. Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut Moyen Âge de saint Grégoire le Grand à la désunion entre Byzance et Rome*, Paris, 1968.

⁶¹ Rabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in libros IV Regum*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 109, col. 40B (1 Kings 13:1).

⁶² See, among many examples, Rabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in libros II Paralipomenon*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 109, col. 283AB (1 Chronicles 1:10, which echoes Genesis 10:8).

⁶³ See, for instance, Angelomus of Luxeuil, *Enarrationes in libros Regum*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 115, col. 459B (3 Kings 8:65).

⁶⁴ Rabanus entitles one of his chapters ‘De tyrannide Athaliae matris Ochoziae regis’; see *Commentaria in libros IV Regum*, col. 238D (4 Kings 10).

⁶⁵

⁶⁶

The author implies that a tyrant is he who exercises a cruel and vindictive kind of rule, even if it is God who adopts here that stance, which is not, therefore, reserved for the devil and his henchmen. Haimo picks up that train of thought later on when he points out, with regard to Isaiah 28:21, that God's tyrannical behavior does not make Him a tyrant *per se*:

His work is alien to Himself. Why is it alien? Because the work of God is to show pity, to protect everyone and lavish on them the benefit of His mercy. But when He is annoyed by human misdeeds, He strikes and takes revenge, which is the work of a cruel man and a tyrant, and this is why it is alien to Him who carries it out.⁶⁷

Being a tyrant is tantamount to being violent, and that is further elaborated later on when with regard to Isaiah 65:25—'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox . . . They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord'—Haimo explains:

Who are they who won't harm and who won't they harm? Wolf and lion, that is any abuser and cruel tyrant, once he abandons his old cruelty and embraces faith, will not harm the lambs and oxen any more, that is, the meek and the humble.⁶⁸

The term 'tyrant' is invested here with moral connotations, deprived of its association with political power. To be sure, the reference to predators such as wolves and lions evokes concepts of domination or at least devastation. Cruelty, furthermore, is associated in this passage with paganism as it is Christian faith that converts to mildness and peace. There are echoes here of pastoral imagery in the Gospels, especially in relation to the mission that Christ entrusted to the apostles.⁶⁹

The term 'tyrant' is used in commentaries featuring the spiritual type of explication in a much more pronounced way than in nonexegetical sources. That type is predominantly tropological, especially in homilies, and generally focuses on the devil in his various roles. Rabanus Maurus asserts, for instance, that the figure of Cyrus is similar to that of Christ: both of them—one after the fall of the Chaldeans, the other after the Incarnation—liberated the people, put them back into the hands of God, and reconstructed the Temple, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 364.

that the mediator between God and men, once the devil's reign on earth is destroyed, will reassemble in God's Church the 'chosen who had been led astray by his tyranny'. According to Rabanus, the Church is at the same time present and future: it is founded by Christ on earth along the lines of the celestial Jerusalem. The commentator accumulates here three hermeneutic registers—historical, ecclesiological, and analogical—in each one of which tyranny signifies the devil's power and influence over human beings.⁷⁰ In one of his homilies, Heiric of Auxerre describes tyranny as bad rule in tropological terms. This is how he comments on the words of Christ—'I will no longer talk much with you, for the prince of this world is coming'—upon announcing to the apostles his imminent departure in John 14:30:

The Lord calls the devil *prince of this world*, not in the sense that he is the ruler of the Creation but because he exerts his tyrannical dominion over the hearts of those reprobates that the divine Scripture tends to call 'world' on account of the baseness of their designs.⁷¹

More rarely the tyrant becomes the Antichrist in an eschatological perspective. Walafrid Strabo provides an example at the beginning of his commentary on Psalm 18:1:

Psalm on the First Coming, by means of which the tyrant is defeated and man is liberated. The prophet here turns his attention *unto the end*, that is, toward Christ, or even towards the end of time.⁷²

The tyrant, therefore, is both anti-Christ (First Coming) and Antichrist (Second Coming). Allegorical explanation employs the term to identify the devil's dominion as opposed to Christ's kingship.

In this sense, the battle between vices and virtues is also conceived as a battle against the tyrant that is Evil. Reformulating God's words to his people, as transmitted by the prophet Micaiah, Haimo of Auxerre writes: 'But you, not only do you refrain from proper conduct, but you actually rebel against me and oppose me in a tyrannical spirit (*tyrannico spiritu*).'⁷³ 'Tyrannical' here evokes the figure of the devil who rebels against God. Florus of Lyon employs the adjective in similar

⁷⁰ *Commentaria in libros II Paralipomenon*, col. 537AB (2 Chronicles 36:22–3).

⁷¹ *Heirici Autissiodorensis Homiliae per circulum anni*, eds R. Quadri and R. Demeulenaere, vol. 3, Turnhout, 1994, p. 132.

⁷² Walafrid Strabo, *Expositio in Psalmos*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 113, col. 870C (Psalms 18:1).

⁷³ Haimo of Auxerre, *Enarratio in Michaeam Prophetam*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 117, col. 149D (Micah 2:8).

terms with regard to the original sin: '... due to Adam's transgression human nature was corrupted and our intelligence was stifled by carnal pleasures . . ., or by tyrannical damnation . . .'.⁷⁴ Biblical commentaries, therefore, replicate the meanings of the term discussed above, particularly those encountered in Rabanus Maurus' *De universo*, which does not come as a surprise, since that is the goal of every encyclopedia. What differs, however, is the ratio of different types of meaning. When it comes to defining tyranny, the exegetical treatises focus more on moral criteria and less on legality. Power abuse, illegitimacy, and usurpation are of secondary importance, while the association of the tyrant with evil, vice, the devil, and, more generally, with soteriological issues, is more emphatically delineated. And yet, these two poles—legitimacy and morality—are inextricably linked in the majority of Carolingian sources, and especially in mirrors for princes, biblical commentaries, and council canons. The perpetual interaction between biblical and 'immediate' history makes it necessary to read the latter in the light of the meaning with which 'tyrant' is invested in exegetical texts. Despite his frequent appearances in the commentaries, it would be an exaggeration to argue that behind all the uses of the term lurks the devil and his followers. That specific association, however, has undoubtedly a place in the connotative range of the term in the Carolingian period, as attested in a broad spectrum of works, including historical narratives.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this survey has been to demonstrate the importance and polyvalence of terms derived from the root *tyran-* in the Carolingian period. Eighth- and ninth-century authors often remarked on the neutral use of such terms in antiquity, proceeding to clarify that since then they had acquired negative connotations and referred mainly to bad kings. These authors combined pagan and patristic authorities with their own ethico-political norms and ideals, thereby producing a new discourse on tyranny. The Carolingian tyrant governs alone, without counselors and in criminal defiance of the law. He falls prey to vice, gives rise to scandal, undermines social stability, and chooses to forget that his power is coming from God, the only real king. Interestingly, however, this conception of tyranny was not applied exclusively to usurpers or cruel and unjust rulers; on the contrary, it was also used for every agent of abusive power, either secular or ecclesiastical, and especially for the devil, as the head of a polity opposed to that of Christ. This speaks to the kind of

⁷⁴ Florus of Lyon, *Dicta Cyrilli Alexandrini et aliorum*, 22 (*Ep. ad Hebraeos*), in *Flori Lugdunensis Opera omnia*, vol. 3:3, p. 200.

moralism that permeated political life in the Carolingian period, starting especially with the reign of Louis the Pious. It also gives an extra layer to historical narratives where the root *tyran-* was used to stigmatize the enemy, as the derivative terms were invested with connotations that were not there in pagan antiquity. Nevertheless, one should not see in every use of the terms in question the tropological dimension that is predominantly encountered in biblical exegesis. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the distinction of ‘literary’ genres on which this study has been necessarily based is partly artificial—grammar and exegesis, for instance, are closely interrelated and can hardly be considered in isolation from each other. It is the historian’s task to provide the proper interpretation of the terms, and that can only happen on a case-by-case basis and by reconstructing the context of each individual source under consideration.

8

There Are No 'Bad Kings'

TYRANNICAL CHARACTERS AND EVIL COUNSELORS IN MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

Cary J. Nederman



THE MAIN TITLE of this chapter is intended to present a conundrum. *Of course* there were numerous rulers during the Latin Middle Ages who, reigning as legitimate kings, were bad, evil, cruel, and vicious. Yet the normative political discourse of the time uniformly equated 'kingship' with 'good rulership'; in this sense, medieval thinkers refused to countenance the very idea of a 'bad king'—the phrase was simply oxymoronic. A monarch who ruled badly was instead classified as a 'tyrant'. This nomenclature distinguished the Middle Ages from much of classical Roman convention, especially prevalent during the Republic, of treating the words *rex* (king) and *tyrannus* as synonymous or even definitionally identical, a topic that Yelena Baraz discusses in her contribution to the present volume. Already in the twelfth century, John of Salisbury, one of the leading medieval analysts of tyranny, criticized those who 'have associated kings with tyranny'—he cites passages from Virgil and Lucan—on the linguistic grounds that "king" (*rex*) is derived from the "right" (*recte*) which is fitting for princes, so this name refers incorrectly to tyrants.¹ Thus, if one is to study evil monarchs as they were conceived theoretically in medieval Europe, one must concentrate on the discourse of tyranny. In turn, the dominant presumption throughout the Middle Ages, intimated by John's remark, was

¹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. and transl. C. J. Nederman, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 191–2.

that tyranny, like kingship, had a profoundly moral and spiritual bearing. Just as the king by definition does what is right (i.e., what accords with the precepts of divine, natural, and human justice) on account of his personal virtue, the tyrant governs in accordance with his own vicious character. The nature of the principal office (kingly or tyrannical) depends principally on the personalized moral and spiritual qualities of the incumbent. The framework of medieval political thought was in this way at a great distance from modern assumptions about constitutional limitations on royal political power.²

In the present chapter, I wish to examine some of the main lines of discussion of tyranny—the corrupt form of rule by a single man—and its impact on public order articulated during the Latin Middle Ages. My aim will not be to summarize the numerous medieval condemnations of tyrannical behavior but rather to demonstrate that tyranny proved to be a somewhat elastic concept. In particular, I argue that medieval thinkers—no matter how much they might revile tyranny—often demonstrated remarkable ambivalence toward the role tyrants played in political life. The tyrannical ruler could be viewed, for instance, as a divine instrument or as an appropriate governor in cases where a populace was otherwise incapable of accepting virtuous rulers. Moreover, overtly tyrannical conduct might be challenged obliquely by pointing to the evil not of a prince himself but of those who advised him concerning matters of state. As Judith Ferster has commented, ‘Criticizing the king was sometimes dangerous,’³ and labeling a reigning prince a ‘tyrant’ might well be viewed as a disloyal and treasonable act. On the whole, then, I contend that careful study of concepts of tyranny during the Middle Ages reveals complex and sometimes shrouded attitudes toward the vices of rulers and the consequences thereof for their subjects.

EARLY SOURCES

The early Middle Ages lacked direct access to the vast majority of classical Greek and Roman political texts that had examined the idea of tyranny (and the classification of constitutional systems more generally). The political writings of Plato and Aristotle, Polybius and Cicero, were largely unavailable and unknown. Rather, at least until Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* were translated into Latin during the

² See C. J. Nederman, ‘Conciliarism and Constitutionalism: Jean Gerson and Medieval Political Thought,’ *History of European Ideas*, 12, 1990, pp. 189–209; and idem, ‘Constitutionalism—Medieval and Modern: Against Neo-Figgisite Orthodoxy (Again),’ *History of Political Thought*, 17:2, 1996, pp. 179–94.

³ J. Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England*, Philadelphia, 1996, p. 2.

middle of the thirteenth century (about which more will be said below), the primary sources for the discussion of tyranny were intermediary Christian authorities of the late classical and postclassical periods. Interestingly, as we shall see, the recovery of Aristotle did not lead to a complete repudiation of the conceptual apparatus of earlier times; rather, thinkers who were fully conversant with Aristotelian political philosophy continued to refer to and apply Christian sources as well.

Two figures stand out for the influence exerted upon medieval thought by their definitions of tyranny. First, Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory I, c. 540–604), in his *Moralia*, explained tyranny as a term that could potentially apply to any person who pridefully exercised power. On the one hand, he claimed, ‘A tyrant properly speaking (*proprie*) is one who governs a republic without law (*non jure*).’ Yet tyrants are also to be found in other walks of life: ‘One in a republic through an office that has been conferred upon him; another in a province, another in a city (*civitas*), another in his own house, while another may practice tyranny through his own inner malice, by not regarding God in his own innermost thoughts . . .’⁴ Thus, Gregory is quite clear that tyranny is a consequence of the condition of one’s soul, pertaining to one’s relationship to God. The political or public tyrant, to whom the word is usually applied, is but a single species of a genus of human beings who seek power in order to oppress their fellows. Gregory also asserts that political tyrants, no less than kings, possess their authority at the command of God and perform a divine function, punishing a people for its wickedness. Thus, in his view, the tyrant is not to be resisted or even criticized but must rather be endured as a divine penalty until such time as God Himself chooses to withdraw His punishment. To offer any offense to a tyrant is, in the words of the Carlyles, ‘to offend against God, who has set him over men.’⁵

The second important source for early medieval discussions of tyranny was Isidore of Seville (fl. late sixth through early seventh centuries). In his *Etymologies*, Isidore drew a sharp distinction between kingship as the ideal form of government and tyranny as the evil type. Though Isidore shows awareness that the term derives from the Greeks and that the early Romans employed it as an equivalent to kingship, he denies any identification of the tyrant with the king. Isidore juxtaposes the tyrant to the true king, who loves justice and seeks what is right or best for his people, employing a formulation (adapted, for instance, in the quotation from John of Salisbury given above) that became standard during the Middle Ages: ‘The king (*rex*) is so named

⁴ S. Gregorii Magni *Moralia in Job*, XII.38, ed. M. Adriaen, vol. 2, Turnhout, 1979, p. 654.

⁵ R. W. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, vol. 1, 5th imp., Edinburgh, 1962, p. 152.

on account of doing right (*recte*).⁶ The corrupt character of tyranny stems from its incompatibility with the very goals of earthly society: to realize the harmony and common good of the people in a manner consonant with justice. The tyrant is dominated by his own cupidity, on account of which 'he exercises domination most cruelly over the people.'⁷ By privileging his own personal passions and desires, the tyrant makes his subjects the servants of his every whim. No rule of law—such as one observes in kingly regimes—is possible under tyranny because the will of the ruler *is* the law. Still, Isidore, like Gregory, maintains that the wicked ruler, no less than the good one, is in some sense God's servant, a reflection of divine judgment, and thereby ought not to be opposed by his subjects. Isidore, however, upholds this view with a great deal less vehemence than does Gregory.

JOHN OF SALISBURY

The wide diffusion of Gregory's and Isidore's teachings in later centuries meant that subsequent political thinkers engaged tyranny as the quintessential evil regime. In the ninth century, for instance, Hincmar of Rheims (c. 805–881) examined extensively the differences between tyranny and kingship in the course of a wider examination of the relationship between spiritual and temporal power.⁸ But perhaps the most extensive discussion of tyrannical government may be found in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (1115/20–1180), completed in 1159. Time and again over the course of the treatise's eight books, John emphasizes the sources and consequences of tyranny, and he raises the critical issue of whether and how a subject population might extract itself from the clutches of a tyrant. The closing chapters of the final book constitute a tract on the foundations and dimensions of, and appropriate responses to, tyranny. John identifies the following characteristics as constitutive of the tyrannical regime: the tyrant is violently oppressive; he opposes justice; he cancels the laws and enslaves the people; and he is an image of the devil and of depravity.⁹ These qualities are explicitly and repeatedly contrasted with the features of the king, who governs mercifully in accordance with the law, who possesses the virtues (cardinal as well as Christian) in their proper measure, and who protects the liberty of his subjects. The king is therefore the very image and vicar of God.¹⁰ On

⁶ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX.4, in *Patrologia Latina*, 82, col. 342AB; English transl. S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and O. Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge/New York, 2006, p. 200 (translation modified).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Hincmar of Rheims, *De regis persona et regio ministerio*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 125, cols 833B–856D. For Hincmar, see the chapter by Sumi Shimahara in this volume.

⁹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, pp. 190–91.

every dimension of their personal and political lives, the tyrant and the king stand in extreme opposition. Yet John still holds to the traditional conviction that king and tyrant alike serve God's purposes. 'Tyrants are ministers of God', he remarks, 'who by His judgment has willed them to be pre-eminent over both soul and body. By means of tyrants the evil are punished and the good are corrected and trained.'¹¹ Even as he reviles tyrants and hails kings, John is fully aware that both play a role in a vast providential scheme.

While many aspects of John's discussion were adapted from the received views found in Gregory and Isidore, several features of his account of tyranny seem to be either novelties or considerable extensions of his sources. One facet of this development is John's recognition that the categories of 'king' and 'tyrant' are really sorts of ideal typologies that, while at times realized by historical figures, are usually only minimally realized in practice. Great power has been conferred on princes, who are nonetheless fallible and weak human beings. Hence, in most cases, John appears to understand that rulers will fall somewhere between the extremes of great goodness and great evil.

For indeed princes are reputed for justice even when they refrain from injury; and their faculty for harm is the very substance of their merit. To refuse evil is a great thing in them, even if they do no great goodness, provided that they do not permit their subjects to indulge in evil.¹²

The prince who refrains from misusing his vast powers and who pursues policies that maintain the harmonious order of the community assures happiness (on earth and in heaven) for himself, his progeny, and his subjects. This assertion tempers the implication that only the very best of rulers—kings in the complete sense—are bound to be rewarded by God.

Moreover, taking a cue from Gregory's view that tyranny may be said to exist not only in the leader of a republic but also in occupants of lesser offices and roles, John applies his analysis of the tyrannical temperament to the entire composition of the community. In the fifth and sixth books of the *Policraticus*, he had famously described the well-ordered communal whole by analogy to the various parts of the human body, ranging from the royal head all the way down to the peasant and artisan feet.¹³ John returns to the organic theme in his discussion of tyranny in the final Book 8. He labels the unjust, tyrannical community 'the republic of the impious'.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 201.

¹² Ibid., p. 55.

Such a body distinguishes itself by the fact that all its sections partake of the same tyrannical properties.

For the republic of the impious has both its head and members, and it endeavors to be fashioned like the civil institutions of the legitimate republic. Its tyrannical head, therefore, is the image of the devil; its soul is formed of heretical, schismatic and sacrilegious priests and, to use the words of Plutarch, prefects of religion, assailing the laws of the Lord; the heart of impious counselors is like a senate of iniquity; its eyes, ears, tongue and unarmed hand are unjust officials, judges and laws; its armed hand is violent soldiers, whom Cicero labels mercenaries; its feet are those among the more humble occupations who oppose the precepts of the Lord and legitimate institutions.¹⁴

While John does not discuss the operation of this tyrannical community in greater detail, it is clear that he sees a direct correlation between the goals and values of the leading office and those of the other central parts of the sociopolitical totality. Where the common utility animates the rightly arranged civil organism, self-interest pervades the deformed body. In John's vision, the tyrannical ruler could never succeed unless he enjoyed widespread approval of and cooperation from the other parts of the community over which he exercises his violent domination.

John also steps away from the preceding tradition of tyranny by suggesting that the tyrant may properly be slain, which seems to conflict with his claim that all power derives from God. He attempts to reconcile this apparent contradiction by asserting that 'it is just for public tyrants to be killed and the people to be liberated for obedience to God'.¹⁵ Central to his approach to philosophy was the belief that people have duties both to their fellow citizens and to God to act for the common good—to what he calls honor and religion. John does not take the commission of tyrannicide to be ultimately the result of a human judgment, but of divine determination: 'Wickedness is always punished by the Lord; but sometimes He uses His own sword and sometimes He uses a sort of human sword in the punishment of the impious.'¹⁶ In a valid act of tyrannicide, the tyrant slayer is no more than a divine proxy. Lacking some idea of an institutional method for limiting the power of princes (such as deposition or impeachment), John thus turns to a direct remedy when confronted with an evil ruler whose continued governance threatens the moral and spiritual health of the community. John is careful in the *Policraticus* to stipulate

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 193–4.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 210.

that no one should rush to kill a tyrant: correction, patience, and prayer must precede action. Moreover, John closely regulates the way in which a tyrant may legitimately be eliminated: 'Not that I do not believe that tyrants are to be removed from the community, but they are to be removed without loss of religion and honor.'¹⁷ The suggestion that there is an appropriate time and method for slaying a tyrant indicates directly John's belief in the existence of correlative spiritual and political duties to perform such an act. God remains, of course, the final judge of anyone who lifts a hand against a tyrant: only the person whose intent is pure and genuine will be absolved by Him. The fear of divine retribution constitutes an adequate check, in John's view, on abuse of his teaching about tyrannicide.

TYRANNY AND THE SCHOLASTICS

The Gregorian and Isidorean conceptions of tyranny were supplemented during the thirteenth century by the appearance in Latin translation of the major works of Aristotle's social thought, namely, Robert Grosseteste's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* during the mid-1240s and William of Moerbeke's version of the *Politics* around 1260. Both works include considerable discussion of tyranny as one, but not the only, form of corrupt rule (alongside oligarchy and democracy). Thus, the availability of Aristotle's writings broadened considerably the constitutional classification of political systems and introduced new complications into the analysis of government. This is so in several senses. First, by proposing that there are multiple types of evil regimes, Aristotle invited reflection on the question of whether there was a rank ordering among them, that is, whether one or another was the utterly worst, second worst, or best-of-the-worst. Aristotle himself maintained in the *Politics* that 'tyranny, which is the worst of governments, is necessarily the farthest removed from a well-constituted form'.¹⁸ Second, Aristotle differentiated among the various sorts of each of the corrupt constitutions, so that not all democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies were identical. In the case of tyranny, he says, three kinds may be detected. Two types (one found among the barbarians, the other in archaic Greece) are elective and hence voluntary, although the tyrant's powers may be despotic; consequently, 'both are according to law, and therefore easily pass over into royalty'.¹⁹ The third is entirely arbitrary and thus hateful to free men.²⁰ Finally, Aristotle offers surprisingly extensive advice concerning techniques for coping with

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1289b2–3, ed. S. Everson, Cambridge, 1988, p. 82.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1295a9, p. 96.

²⁰ Ibid., 1295a17–23, p. 96.

tyranny and even stabilizing it.²¹ He proposes that the policies of the tyrant can be 'moderated' in such fashion that 'his power, too, will be more lasting. His disposition will be virtuous, or at least half virtuous; and he will not be wicked, but half wicked only.'²² All these points invite a more intricate understanding of tyranny.

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) was perhaps the first important medieval thinker to develop an Aristotelian approach to tyrannical government alongside the insights of earlier Christian ideas. In the chapters of *De regimine principum* (sometimes called *De regno*) that are commonly (though somewhat controversially)²³ ascribed to him, Aquinas engages in an interesting fusion of Aristotelian and conventional Christian language. On the one hand, he explains that tyrannical government is directed not toward the common good but instead toward the private interests of the ruler, and thus is unjust. This follows Aristotle's view quite precisely. Yet when Aquinas explicates the imperfect forms of rule, he casts them in a manner that overtly follows Isidore's language:

If, therefore, government is exercised unjustly by one man alone, who, in ruling, seeks gain for himself and not the good of the community, such a ruler is called a tyrant . . . because he oppresses with power and does not rule with justice. Hence, among the ancients all men of power were called 'tyrants.'²⁴

In turn, Aquinas treats oligarchy and democracy as alternate forms of tyranny, sharing their operative features with the tyrannical regime as Isidore had conceived it: in oligarchy, 'the few oppress the people, and it differs from tyranny only in respect to number', while in democracy 'the common people oppress the rich by force of numbers. In this the whole people will be like a single tyrant.'²⁵ Aquinas adapts Isidore's discourse of oppression, so that oligarchy and democracy become simply collective tyrannies, rather than corrupt systems that embraced unique misunderstandings about justice, as Aristotle maintained in Book 5 of the *Politics*.

In a later chapter of *De regimine principum*, Aquinas engages in a tyrannology that touches on the other imperfect regimes only inasmuch as they are instructive for the understanding of the evils of the tyrant and the perfection of the king. Accepting Aristotle's ranking of the best and worst systems within both ideal and corrupt constitutions, Aquinas sets out to excoriate the tyrant.²⁶ The tyrant appears to

²¹ Ibid., 1310a40–1315b10, pp. 129–40.

²² Ibid., 1315b8–10, p. 140.

²³ The authorship of the first portion of *De regimine principum* remains vexed; see the exchange between Kenneth Pennington and Cary Nederman in *Medieval Academy News*, 149, Winter 2004, p. 2.

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, ed. and transl. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge, 2002, p. 8.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 11–12.

constitute such an evil for the community that one might infer that a society would gladly accept democracy or oligarchy over tyranny. But the force of his case is merely rhetorical. Aquinas points out that there are gradations even within forms of tyranny and that there is less evil to be found in tyrannical government than in corrupt government exercised by a group of people. He reasons that the corruption engendered by oligarchy or democracy leads to internal dissension within the community, which is ultimately more harmful than the rule of a single evil man.²⁷ Likewise, Aquinas observes, the historical study of tyrannical regimes demonstrates that they are more likely to arise from societies in which a multitude rules than those in which a monarchy had previously existed.²⁸ This becomes Aquinas' justification for generally acquiescing to tyrants in the face of alternative regimes:

If, however, the tyrant is not so excessive, it is more advantageous to tolerate a degree of tyranny for the time being than to take action against the tyrant and so incur many perils more grievous than the tyranny itself. . . . Even when those who take action against a tyrant are able to overthrow him, this fact may itself give rise to many grave dissensions in the populace, either during the rebellion against the tyrant or because, after the tyrant has been removed, the community is divided into factions over the question of what the new ruling order should be.²⁹

In sum, Aquinas wishes no one to conclude that he has afforded any grounds to prefer democracy and oligarchy to the government of tyrants, especially 'moderate' ones. Aquinas does make provision that any community possessing a valid right to select its own ruler may 'without injustice depose and restrain a king whom it has appointed, if he should abuse royal power tyrannically'.³⁰ But tyrannicide is prohibited, and appeals to 'superiors' (whether some earthly overlord such as the emperor, or God Himself) are by far the preferred course of action on the part of oppressed subjects.

Thinkers who followed Aquinas, many of whom were his students at Paris, often extended the lines of his thought. For instance, the continuation of his master's *De regimine principum* by Ptolemy of Lucca (c. 1236–1327), which is nearly three times as long as the portion attributed to Aquinas, moves the argument away from an examination of kingship and into a sustained defense of 'political rule' or mixed

²⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

polity as the best system of government. Ptolemy frames his support of such republican rule through sustained consideration of tyranny's relation to well-ordered constitutions. Ptolemy steps beyond both Christian authorities and Aristotle, while extending Aquinas' forbearance of tyranny in a striking way. Employing a Christian trope that was commonplace by his time, Ptolemy asserts the expediency of tyranny in cases where a populace is incapable of benefiting from good government. Indeed, he terms such tyrannies 'the instruments of divine justice':

A tyrannical government itself shows this to us, because it is not ordained except as a burden and annoyance to its subjects. . . . tyrants act in the same way toward their subjects as lords toward servants and craftspeople toward their implements and instruments. This is punitive to the subjects and against the nature of lordship . . .³¹

Certainly, previous Latin Christian authors had held that tyrants might be divine instruments for the infliction of punishments upon wicked peoples. But Ptolemy's view concentrates on utility rather than God's judgment. Ptolemy subscribes to a quasi-sociological view of good government that enjoyed some currency among the scholastics, according to which different populations are better suited (by environmental circumstance or temperament) to specific types of rule, even, in some cases, tyrannical rule. In a passage in Book 4, he appears to posit a distinction between legitimate and unjustified exercise of tyranny. The former occurs in regions (he cites the examples of Italian provinces such as Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica) where the people 'are servile by nature, and despotic rule should guide these'. By contrast, illegitimate tyranny occurs when territories that 'have a virile spirit, a bold heart and a confidence in their intelligence' are compelled to submit to a single unjust ruler; he refers to the central and northern Italian provinces as illustrations.³² The intriguing conclusion is that, depending on context, tyranny is not always purely and simply evil. As a regime, it may in principle remain corrupt, but as a last-ditch means of imposing peace and order in an otherwise anarchic situation, it may be the best, rather than the worst, of constitutions. Certainly, Gregory and Isidore would have been unlikely to endorse this position; even Aristotle, with his more flexible view, might have been dubious.

A final, and certainly idiosyncratic, scholastic approach to evil rulers may be found in Dante's *De Monarchia*. In his view, corrupt regimes of all sorts constitute grist for the mill of defending universal empire. Dante concentrates on the freedom that he

³¹ Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers*, 3,7,3, ed. and transl. J. M. Blythe, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 164.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.8.4, p. 328.

regards as the 'natural state' of all human beings. For him, the monarch (or world emperor) is uniquely positioned to assure and protect the freedom of all citizens—this is central to the very purpose of his office.³³ Thus, the monarch will suppress corrupt regimes whose goals are antithetical to liberty. When humanity

is under the rule of a monarchy, . . . only then are perverted forms of government (i.e., democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies), which force mankind into slavery, set right—as is clear to anyone who examines them all; and only then do kings, aristocrats (known as the great and the good), and those zealous for the freedom of the people govern justly; for since the monarch loves men most, as we have already noted, he wants all men to become good; and this cannot happen under perverted forms of government.³⁴

Dante believes that a single supreme ruler over all of mankind guarantees that no type of bad government will arise or endure. His interest in evil governments, then, is fueled entirely by his conviction that they must be suppressed by a system of universal rule that transcends and effectively supersedes the Aristotelian constitutional taxonomy.

To be sure, the issue presents itself of why Dante's monarch would not himself become evil. Dante's response to this quandary is as fascinating as it is controversial. He posits that the universal monarch alone fully embodies and realizes justice and, therefore, the common good of all men. Building on a series of syllogisms far too complex to reconstruct in the present context, Dante concludes that 'mankind living under a monarch is in its ideal state [i.e., free and governed justly]; from this it follows that monarchy is necessary for the well-being of the world.'³⁵ Such a universal system alone ensures that no form of bad rule, whether tyranny, oligarchy, or democracy, will come into existence to the detriment of human beings. Whatever we make of Dante's position, it surely represents another facet of the medieval propensity to move beyond either a strictly Gregorian/Isidorean or a purely Aristotelian account of evil governance.

THE AMBIGUOUS TYRANT

The fourteenth century witnessed a discernible expansion of the more flexible attitude evinced by Ptolemy (and, to some extent, Aquinas). Bartolus of Sassoferrato

³³ Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. and transl. P. Shaw, Cambridge/New York, 1996, pp. 19–20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

(1313/14–1357) and Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) contributed to a specialized genre of political treatise *de tyrannia*, in which the merits of tyrannical government were debated. Both authors found repetition of conventional ideas about tyranny without critical reflection to be profoundly unsatisfying and were ready to modify accepted teachings concerning the tyrant. Bartolus, a legal scholar also steeped in scholastic learning, offers a remarkably detailed analysis of the different categories of tyranny, dissecting Gregory's definition, and critically enumerates the standards that may be employed to judge whether a ruler is behaving tyrannically.³⁶ He evinces particular interest, as one might expect from a lawyer, in the extent to which legal obligations (such as contracts, statutes, and judicial decisions) are binding upon citizens when they are imposed by or under a tyrannical government. Bartolus does not adopt an across-the-board position on this issue. Rather, he suggests that the answer is dependent on the particular nature of the tyranny, since he believes that there are gradations of tyrannical behavior that admit of a large gray area between legitimate government and blatant despotism. Bartolus admits of the possibility of what we might term a 'mixed' tyranny, as when a ruler behaves badly toward one faction or group yet generally upholds the public welfare:

If, however, some are held in exile or some in the city are badly treated by exclusion from offices, while in other respects the city is well governed and the common good well cared for, then the person having the title of this sort or some similar distinction would not be a tyrant in the plain meaning of the word. . . . But in respect to external relations or dealings with the enemies of the man thus superior to others, even though he govern the state well, I think we should say the same as if he were a true tyrant. There is no reason why one should not be called a tyrant as to outside territories and a just ruler within the community.³⁷

Indeed, Bartolus seems to doubt whether a completely just ruler, and thus regime, is even within the realm of earthly possibility. He comments that human imperfection is nearly universal and that it is natural for human beings to have regard for their own self-interest. Thus, 'it is a rare thing to find a government which is wholly devoted to the common good without any admixture of tyranny'. The distinction between a good regime and a tyranny is consequently a matter of degree: 'We call that a good government and not a tyranny in which the common good prevails over

³⁶ Bartolus of Sassoferato, *Tractatus de tyrannia*, in *Humanism and Tyranny: Studies in the Italian Trecento*, ed. and transl. E. Emerton, Cambridge, MA, 1925, pp. 126–9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–3.

the private interest of the rulers.³⁸ By implication, Bartolus seems to suggest that application of strict and unwavering standards for judging a prince to be tyrannical is unrealistic and perhaps even disruptive. Even the best of kings is not likely to be unsullied by at least a small measure of vice.

In a less legalistic fashion, Salutati also stood prepared to countenance tyrannical regimes at times. He, too, commences his discussion with Gregory's definition of tyranny, but he introduces a further distinction between two types of tyrants, specifically, those who rule without valid title (usurpers) and those who possess a legitimate claim to office but use their powers unlawfully and unjustly as a result of their prideful characters. This difference is decisive for Salutati, whose main concern is with the legitimacy of slaying tyrants in general and with the murder of Julius Caesar in particular.³⁹ In Salutati's view, the proper treatment of a tyrant is wholly dependent on whether or not he is a usurper. If so, then those subject to him may invoke the Roman law principle that it is 'lawful to repel by force the assailant of an individual or a piece of property and if he persists, to kill him' in order to justify resistance to a tyrant. Salutati upholds 'the right to prevent by force, even to the point of death, one who tries to seize the rule of a city, or kingly power or the government of a republic.'⁴⁰ By contrast, he condemns those who argue that wicked princes ought to be killed even when they hold their office by right—a claim he explicitly ascribes to John of Salisbury, whose *Policraticus* he quotes at length. Disputing what he takes to be John's position, Salutati asserts that only the public authority that placed a ruler in office (whether a superior or the community) enjoys the right to remove him from power; private persons, acting in their own right, have no say in the matter. He declares:

Let no one, therefore, take his own soul in his hand or make reason out of his own will and so rise up against his lord, even though the lord be acting as a tyrant! This may be done only with the approval of an overlord or of the people, not through the impulse of an individual.⁴¹

Salutati rounds off his treatise by applying his argument to the case of Caesar. He purports to prove (in a highly polemical refutation of Cicero) that Caesar was not a usurper but instead held legitimate office authorized by the Roman people. Indeed,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 153.

³⁹ For a fascinating recent study, see T. Sol, *Fallait-il tuer César? L'argumentation politique de Dante à Machiavel*, Paris, 2005, esp. pp. 281–337; see also the chapter by Gabriele Pedullà in this volume.

⁴⁰ Coluccio Salutati, *De tyranno*, in *Humanism and Tyranny*, ed. and transl. Emerton, p. 79.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 93.

Salutati maintains that if Caesar seemed to behave tyrannically, it was because the tumultuous condition of the times called for such conduct. Caesar is to be praised as the savior of Rome, not condemned as a tyrant. Consequently, it was entirely wrong for private citizens to slay Caesar, since he had not usurped public power. Moreover, to the extent that he was serving the common good, the Romans as a people had no legitimate warrant to remove him from office. Salutati thus approaches, if he does not explicitly endorse, a conception of benevolent despotism that challenges the usual bases for the medieval distinction between king and tyrant.

EVIL COUNSELORS

A few brave souls during the Middle Ages might be willing to extrapolate from the theory of tyranny to an accusation of tyrannizing on the part of one or another currently reigning prince, but this was relatively unusual. An alternative route to illuminating the problem of 'bad kings' in an age when no king properly speaking could be called evil was to turn attention away from the ruler himself and direct it toward his advisers and courtiers.⁴² The anonymous author of a political poem, written in Anglo-Norman and Latin during the reign of the English king Edward I, called 'Against the King's Taxes,' expresses this view succinctly: 'One must not impute such wickedness to the king, but to the evil counselor on account of his ferocity. . . . This counsel is not at all good but polluted with vice.'⁴³ The problem of the king whose will and intentions are good but who is led astray by members of his inner circle forms a common theme, in particular, of the royal advice books (commonly known as mirrors for princes) that were widely written and circulated in both Latin and vernacular languages during the Middle Ages.⁴⁴ Broadly speaking, these treatises may be divided into two main subgroups. One, of scholastic derivation, stemmed from the adaptation of Aristotelian political thought to contemporary public life, of which the archetype was the late thirteenth-century *De regimine principum* by Giles of Rome (c. 1243–1316), a huge tome (about 155,000 words) destined to become the single most popular mirror composed in medieval

⁴² A general discussion of this theme is offered by J. T. Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers" and Medieval Baronial Rebellions,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 82:4, 1967, pp. 595–618.

⁴³ 'Song against the King's Taxes,' in *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to That of Edward II*, ed. P. Coss, Cambridge, 1996, p. 184.

⁴⁴ The classic work remains W. Berges, *Die Fürstenspiegel des hohen und späten Mittelalters*, Leipzig, 1938. More specialized studies include *Le prince au miroir de la littérature politique de l'Antiquité aux Lumières*, eds F. Lachaud and L. Scordia, Mont-Saint-Aignan, 2007; and *Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages, 1200–1500*, eds I. Bejczy and C. J. Nederman, Turnhout, 2007. For a useful recent overview of the genre, see C. F. Briggs, *The Body Broken: Medieval Europe, 1300–1520*, London, 2011, pp. 100–105.

Europe. Approximately 350 manuscripts of it—300 in the original Latin, the rest in various vernacular translations—have been identified, and it was the inspiration for countless other advice book writers.⁴⁵ The second main approach to the medieval *speculum principum* genre, centered within court culture itself and given short shrift in academic circles, emerged from the Arabic *Kitāb sirr al-asrār*,⁴⁶ translated into Latin under the title *Secreta* (or *Secretum*) *Secretorum* and circulated as an authentic work by Aristotle.⁴⁷ The product of an anonymous, probably ninth-century, Arabic hand, the *Secreta Secretorum* purports to be a letter of instruction from Aristotle to Alexander, advising the young king on an array of topics necessary for successful rule. The tract, a mainstay of European political writing into the fifteenth century, was disseminated in two Latin translations, of which some four hundred manuscripts exist, as well as countless partial or complete vernacular translations and adaptations.⁴⁸ While there was some cross-fertilization between these scholastic and courtly strands of writing, they formed largely distinct subgenres within the broad category of royal mirrors.

Although both forms of princely *specula* have sometimes been dismissed as unrealistic and unoriginal in their highly moralistic attitude toward government, careful examination reveals that they were often designed as pointed and even critical commentary (albeit veiled) on recent or current events and personages.⁴⁹ Nowhere is this more evident than in the concentration on the counselors and associates of the ruler that pervades such works. Seeking and receiving counsel, both from the leading lords of the realm (ecclesiastical as well as secular) and from professional administrators, was an inherent feature of medieval rulership.⁵⁰ No prince could afford to act unilaterally without consulting the circle of powerful and learned men surrounding him; indeed, to rule in such an ‘arbitrary’ manner constituted precisely a mark of tyranny. Yet, at the same time, royal associates, whether magnates or magistrates, were fully capable of using their access to the king to pursue personal agendas that were

⁴⁵ C. F. Briggs, *Giles of Rome's De Regimine Principum: Reading and Writing Politics at Court, c.1275–c.1525*, Cambridge/New York, 1999.

⁴⁶ The best overview of the original *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* is M. Manzalaoui, ‘The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb sirr al-asrār*: Facts and Problems’, *Oriens*, 23/24, 1974, pp. 147–257.

⁴⁷ See A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 120–21.

⁴⁸ The literature on the Western reception of the text is vast, but there are two excellent recent studies: S. J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: The Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages*, Ann Arbor, MI, 2003; and R. Forster, *Das Geheimnis der Geheimnisse. Die arabischen und deutschen Fassungen des pseudo-aristotelischen Sirr al-asrar/Secretum secretorum*, Wiesbaden, 2006.

⁴⁹ See J.-P. Genet, ‘General Introduction’, in *Four English Political Tracts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. J.-P. Genet, London, 1977, pp. ix–xix; B. Guenée, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, transl. J. Vale, Oxford, 1985, pp. 69–74; Ferster, *Fictions of Advice*, pp. 1–10; C. J. Nederman, ‘The Mirror Crack’d: The *Speculum Principum* as Political and Social Criticism in the Late Middle Ages’, *The European Legacy*, 3:3, 1998, pp. 18–38.

⁵⁰ Guenée, *States and Rulers*, pp. 120–26.

potentially quite at odds with the good of the realm. As John of Salisbury fretted in the mid-twelfth century, courts were sites of intrigue and flattery, where it became extremely difficult to discern whose advice merited credence and whose was self-serving.⁵¹ The dilemma was endemic and structural: a king required counsel, but counselors could readily prove to be untrustworthy in such a fashion as to lead him down an unwitting path toward evil rule.

Medieval princely mirrors commonly sought to confront this tension directly. In the tradition stemming from Giles, the issue of counsel is subsumed under the larger heading of how the king ought to conduct himself in times of peace,⁵² and in particular how he ought to avoid devolving into tyranny.⁵³ Although often disagreeing about specifics, Giles and his imitators adopt a framework that is largely normative and prescriptive, guided by a set of key interrelated issues about the nature of counsel (which matters require seeking advice and how it ought to be sought), as well as the character of counselors and the extent to which they should be completely informed about the king's intentions.⁵⁴ Giles and the many authors who relied on him are especially concerned about the practical problems of judging prudentially how to weigh various conflicting counsels and how to judge the personalities and motives of those from whom advice is solicited both publicly and privately. Much of the argument draws heavily on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (and to a lesser extent the *Rhetoric*) rather than the *Politics*, as might be expected given the focus of the latter on constitutional order rather than the moral discernment of governors. Aristotle, after all, had placed emphasis on 'good laws' as preferable to dependence on the ethical traits of rulers.

So far as I can tell, *De regimine principum*-type writings concentrate mainly on good counsel and thus touch only implicitly on the problem of 'evil counselors'. By contrast, those mirrors that follow the approach of the *Secreta Secretorum* tend to address directly the potential for vicious counsel that lurks within any court, an attitude that some scholars have viewed as presaging Machiavelli's discussion in the twenty-second and twenty-third chapters of *The Prince*.⁵⁵ One particularly noteworthy example of this may be found in a treatise entitled *De nobilitatibus, sapientiis, et prudentiis regum* by Walter de Milemete, an early fourteenth-century clerk at the court of the English kings Edward II and Edward III. Milemete composed his work to accompany a sumptuously illuminated Latin version of the *Secreta Secretorum*

⁵¹ See C. J. Nederman, 'Friendship in Public Life during the Twelfth Century: Theory and Practice in the Writings of John of Salisbury', *Viator*, 38:2, 2007, pp. 385–97.

⁵² Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, III.ii, Rome, 1556.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III.ii.7–14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III.ii.16–19.

⁵⁵ Guenée, *States and Rulers*, p. 73; Ferster, *Fictions of Advice*, pp. 160–73.

presented to Edward III at the beginning of his reign in 1327 (i.e., during the time of the king's minority when his mother, Isabella, was regent). Milemete's own mirror is not intended so much as a commentary on the *Secreta Secretorum* as a 'useful' guide to its main themes, paramount among which, it turns out, is the problem posed by the courtly intrigues of ministers and nobles.⁵⁶ Indeed, aspects of this topic receive attention in seven of the volume's seventeen chapters, far more than any other subject. Chapter 6, for instance, admonishes the king to ensure that conflicts among members of the nobility are quickly mediated, and warns him not to play favorites (the tumultuous reign of Edward II must surely be on Milemete's mind here). Likewise, Milemete recommends to Edward III in Chapter 7 (about royal deliberation) and in Chapter 8 (about the king's gratitude) that the ruler employ his authority and largesse in a manner most likely to produce obedient and compliant subjects, especially among members of the noble class. In all such matters, the king ought to formulate his policies openly in cooperation with his nobles 'in the context of parliaments and other royal councils,'⁵⁷ taking care that he act promptly on expressions of grievance and explain his decisions clearly and completely.

Rather than simply leave matters at the level of these broad and somewhat idealized generalities, however, Milemete raises a series of issues concerning how the king is to evaluate members of his court. He points out that those who serve the ruler generally do so for one of three reasons: out of genuine loyalty stemming from love and moral honor; on account of the desire to obtain profit or reward; and for reason of compulsion by a superior.⁵⁸ All are worthy in their own way, Milemete says, and are deserving of appropriate reward. Yet a man who falls into the first category—whose service is rooted in virtue—is clearly more trustworthy than the others, such that 'a lord may place firm confidence in such a client regarding counsels about private and personal actions that touch upon the improvement or prejudice of the lord' precisely because the loving servant places his master's well-being above his own.⁵⁹ Obviously, then, the ability to ascertain loyalty on the part of one's counselors is of the utmost importance for the security of the king, particularly in affairs that are delicate or require secrecy. On the one hand, there may be times when it is necessary to expose one's innermost plans or intentions to an inferior, as when charging a secretary with the composition of a letter or discussing battle plans with magnates. But,

⁵⁶ Walter de Milemete, *De nobilitatibus, sapientiis, et prudentiis regum*, in *Political Thought in Early Fourteenth-Century England: Treatises by Walter de Milemete, William of Pagula, and William of Ockham*, ed. and transl. C. J. Nederman, Tempe/Turnhout, 2002, p. 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–40.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

on the other hand, the chances are great that important state secrets will be exposed to one's own detriment:

... seldom may there be found a man who is so reliably stable that a noble can confide regarding his secrets in business of great danger and difficulty; indeed, he will become aware that he has been injured and deceived in the end, because the Devil, by promising people worldly honors and riches, suggests to them unlawful deeds, drives them to perversity, and makes them evil, except for those such who may be proven constant and faithful.⁶⁰

Such is the bleak world of the court confronted by the king. Milemete time and again warns about the dark side of human conduct: deception, cupidity, avarice, and jealousy are everywhere. The human propensity toward self-interest, if not downright viciousness, must place the ruler on his guard regarding those whom he takes into his confidence. The guileless king prepares the conditions for his own downfall by admitting evil counselors into his circle and heeding them.

Is there any remedy for the snares posed by the potential for evil counsel? Here Milemete turns directly for assistance to the *Secreta Secretorum*, which had proposed that the king employ various techniques to establish the loyalty of his counselors. In particular, the ruler should be certain that a prospective adviser can be trusted to keep secrets, which can be discovered by means of concealed tests, for example, by posing 'questions to your future counselor wisely and covertly about the private deeds and counsels' of a close friend. Indeed, this stratagem should be repeated 'many times—hungry, fed, drunk, and in various states', until the would-be counselor either gives up what he knows or demonstrates a constancy in his refusal to divulge personal information that confirms his trustworthiness.⁶¹ Likewise, a careful king avoids the counsel of people who voluntarily approach him with reports of conspiracies against his government, since such persons thereby reveal their deceitfulness. In such cases, rather, Milemete recommends to the ruler that 'you ought to show them a pleasant countenance as you thank them (as is required)', yet on no account admit them among his intimates, 'as they are purveyors of deceit'.⁶² Milemete furthermore recommends that 'through astrological knowledge a true judgment may be possessed . . . as to how a person can come to know the difference between the false and the loyal, and to whom his counsel can securely be handed . . .'⁶³ This

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 44–5.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 46.

reference to occult practices is not so strange a view as might be imagined, given the widespread popularity of astrology at medieval courts as a method for engaging in political decisions.⁶⁴ The more overarching lesson taught by Milemete is that a competent and worthy king must be proactive in winnowing out among the many candidates for inclusion among his intimate counselors those who are afflicted with vices such as jealousy, envy, covetousness, and mendacity—qualities that are likely to result in ‘evil counsel’. Only those ‘who are faithful and have been strictly sworn to reveal nothing and are men of good repute and are reputed faithful by the common people’ should be admitted into the ruler’s inner circle.⁶⁵ This represents the king’s ultimate protection (however cynical it may sound) against accusations that he has been swayed by evil counselors, a charge likely to endanger the peaceful administration of his realm. The tumultuous reign of King Edward II demonstrates well enough what occurs when such a ruler is in thrall to advisers dedicated to pursuing their own advantage rather than the public welfare.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

As I suggested at the outset, the dominant medieval view that the nature of a princely government was shaped by the personal character of its incumbent (or of his trusted advisers) entailed that by definition there were no ‘bad kings’ per se, but only tyrants or evil counselors. One of the most important intellectual transformations from medieval to early modern political worldviews was the erosion of such a personalized conception of power, occasioned by the emergence of such leading ideas as reason of state, sovereignty, and constitutionalism.⁶⁷ In depersonalizing government, these central principles shifted attention away from the moral attributes of officeholders and toward the qualities of the institutions themselves. This does not mean, of course, that the language and concepts associated with medieval personalized rulership disappeared immediately or completely: Bodin and Locke, to cite two instances, were still able to talk about ‘tyrants’ and ‘tyranny’.⁶⁸ Even Machiavelli, that supposedly ‘amoral’ theorist of power, still judged the success or failure of the prince

⁶⁴ See C. J. Nederman, *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations along the Medieval/Modern Divide from John of Salisbury to Hegel*, Washington, DC, 2009, pp. 281–9.

⁶⁵ Walter de Milemete, *De nobilitatibus*, p. 46.

⁶⁶ See S. Phillips, *Edward II*, New Haven/London, 2010. The opposition to Edward II’s reign is treated by C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England*, Aldershot, 2003, pp. 122–62.

⁶⁷ On this topic generally, see Nederman, *Lineages of European Political Thought*, esp. pp. 13–48, 99–121 and 304–42.

⁶⁸ E.g., Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, ed. and transl. J. Franklin, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 120–25; John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 398–405.

according to his personal characteristics.⁶⁹ Yet, eventually, it seems to me, the position articulated by Hobbes won the day, namely, that ‘the name of tyranny signifieth nothing more or less than the name of sovereignty (be it in one or many men), saving that they that use the former word are understood to be angry with them they call tyrants.’⁷⁰ For Hobbes, the charge of tyranny represents essentially a subjective opinion, rather akin to expressing distaste for peas or broccoli. ‘Tyrannophobes,’ as he calls them, are ultimately nothing less than subverters of all political order.⁷¹ In modern parlance, then, the ‘bad king’ (or ‘bad government’ more generally) equates to rule that violates some objectively verifiable standard of the essentially temporal purpose for which political power exists, whether the maintenance of public peace (as in Hobbes) or the protection of rights or liberties (as for Locke and later liberals) or some other measure.⁷² While even in the twenty-first century we may speak of a particular ruler or regime as ‘tyrannical,’ we generally refer by that term to nothing more or less than a flagrant and systemic violation of a deeply cherished political principle, such as human rights.⁷³ This reflects dedication to a very different conceptual universe from the Latin Middle Ages—a separation of the personal from the political. And when we apply the term ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ to a particular official in, say, a modern constitutional system—think of the accusations made against Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld during and after the administration of George W. Bush—we do not thereby delegitimize the very office held by that person, since such an apparently moralistic judgment starts with the established institutional authority of the office itself and condemns the incumbent for failing to conform to the requirements thereof. In sum, the transition from medieval to modern in this regard is fundamental and decisive. The normative equation of a regime type with the moral characteristics of the person who exercises power—the basis of the medieval distinction between ‘king’ and ‘tyrant’—is wholly a phenomenon of the past.

⁶⁹ See C. J. Nederman, *Machiavelli: A Beginner's Guide*, Oxford, 2009, pp. 50–62.

⁷⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. E. Curley, Indianapolis, 1994, p. 429.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 429.

⁷² A possible, although partial, exception to this historiographical principle—and hence a sort of forerunner to Hobbes—may be Marsilius of Padua; see B. Koch, *Zur Dis-/Kontinuität mittelalterlichen politischen Denkens in der neuzeitlichen politischen Theorie*, Berlin, 2005.

⁷³ For a recent example, see F. G. Mohamed, ‘The Tyrant as Target,’ *The New York Times*, 12 May 2013, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/author/feisal-g-mohamed/?scp=2-b&sq=G&st=nyt> (last accessed December 30, 2017).

A Crooked Mirror for Princes

VERNACULAR REFLECTIONS ON WENCESLAS IV 'THE IDLE'

Pavĺína Rychterová



AT THE BEGINNING of the fifteenth century, three of the leading European monarchies experienced an overthrow of their established ruler. The power of the kings of France and England, and of the Holy Roman emperor-elect, was called into question almost simultaneously. The English king, Richard II (1367–1400), and the emperor-elect or king of the Romans, Wenceslas IV (1361–1419), were both dethroned, in 1399 and 1400, respectively.¹ At the same time in France, strong dissatisfaction with the regime eventually found an outlet in the murder of the king's brother, Louis, Duke of Orléans.² There are many reasons for this remarkable simultaneity, and modern historiography has explored quite a few.³ But certain questions have remained more or less outside the scope of scholarly examination: among these is the role of concepts of good and bad rule in the political discourse of the time. Yet there are good reasons for taking this literature seriously as a reflection of, and potential

¹ Wenceslas IV, however, did retain his position as king of Bohemia until his death in 1419.

² For Louis' murder as the culmination of a critical moment in the history of French monarchy, see B. Guenée, *Un meurtre, une société. L'assassinat du duc d'Orléans, 23 novembre 1407*, Paris, 1992.

³ See, for example, G. Bordonove, *Charles VI. Le roi fol et bien-aimé*, Paris, 2006; B. Carqué, 'Krise des Königtums—Krise der Repräsentation? Höfische Kunstaufräge unter den Bedingungen polyzentrischer Herrschaft in Frankreich um 1400', in *Bilder der Macht im Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Byzanz—Okzident—Russland*, eds O. G. Oexle and M. A. Bojcov, Göttingen, 2007, pp. 315–60; *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, eds A. Goodman and J. L. Gillespie, Oxford/New York, 1999; C. Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377–99*, Oxford/New York, 2008; F. Rexroth, 'Tyrannen und Taugenichtse. Beobachtungen zur Ritualität europäischer Königsabsetzungen im späten Mittelalter', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 278, 2004, pp. 27–53.

factor in, these crises of monarchy. Wenceslas IV, the deposed emperor-elect, was the object of many extremely unflattering representations in contemporary writings, which have shaped his reception to the present day. While it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to quantify the impact of this literature on the political developments of the period, I want in this chapter to highlight its particular qualities in relation to the new social and political constellations of late medieval Europe. I also examine its role in shaping Wenceslas' image for posterity and reflect on the challenges and possibilities it presents for historiographical analysis.

The concepts of ideal rulership were not new: as the earlier chapters in the volume have shown, most of their elements were ancient, and transformed for the representation of Christian kings by a long line of late antique, Arabic, and medieval writers. They did, however, during this period enter fresh contexts of communication. For the first time in the Latin West, the late Middle Ages witnessed the production of political literature in the vernaculars. This went hand in hand with the emergence of new discursive communities that consumed but also generated political knowledge and opinions.⁴ It is no coincidence that England as well as Bohemia—Wenceslas' homeland—saw at this time the rise of reform movements, which are traditionally labeled 'Lollardy'⁵ and 'Hussitism',⁶ respectively. Although both are best known as religious movements or, in the language of the time, heresies, neither was limited to spiritual matters. Products of the accelerated transformation of late medieval society, they were formed around university theologians struggling for profound societal reforms, whose messages galvanized members of the economic and political elites, as well as social strata that had no say in power decisions: burghers, artisans, women, and the municipal poor. Consequently, in both cases the vernacular became a new instrument of political communication, whose influence can be compared to the diffusion of the printing press and the ensuing media change on the eve of the Lutheran Reformation. Vernacular texts were no passive instruments of lay catechesis, education, and entertainment. Rather, the vernaculars were crucial for negotiations of religious as well as secular power, which became more and more contingent with the growing complexity of contemporary society. They were new 'learned languages', and thus new, increasingly important means of expression in the political discourse of the time.⁷

⁴ For this late medieval 'public', see P. Rychterová, 'Die Verbrennung von Johannes Hus als europäisches Ereignis. Öffentlichkeit und Öffentlichkeiten am Vorabend der hussitischen Revolution', in *Politische Öffentlichkeit im Spätmittelalter*, eds M. Kintzinger and B. Schneidmüller, Ostfildern, 2011, pp. 361–84.

⁵ A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*, Oxford, 1988; R. Rex, *The Lollards: Social History in Perspective*, New York, 2002.

⁶ F. Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, 3 vols, Hannover, 2002.

⁷ See *Thinking Politics in the Vernacular from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, eds G. Briguglia and T. Ricklin, Fribourg, 2011, p. 8; cf. also, for example, P. Geary, *Language and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, Waltham,

The transmitted vernacular texts dealing with the concepts of ideal rulership for the most part belong to the genre of mirrors for princes. Current scholarship has mostly regarded them as a mere reflection of the existing Latin discourse of rulership, not as an active vehicle of ideas that could shape it.⁸ This is not entirely wrong, of course: most of the vernacular texts that deal with the problem of ideal rule are a kind of simplified reproduction of highly sophisticated theories written in Latin and embedded in the mainstream of the religious education of laypeople. But not all of them are like that, and, furthermore, the apparently simplest ones are not as simple as they seem. Unfortunately, modern historiography has tended to underestimate them and has left their interpretation and contextualization to literary studies, which in return tend to ignore the social impact of these texts and their often ambivalent potential for historiographical insight. But the disciplines should work together to mutual benefit. A collaborative approach is the only means to redress tendencies in current historiography to absorb medieval frames of interpretation and adopt them as a matrix for our own analyses. Since portrayals of good and bad rulers are necessarily reflections of the moral and definitional frameworks of their authors, they are particularly prone to such 'interpretive merging.'⁹ Modern historiography has frequently adopted appraisals by contemporary authors, especially when they are clad in highly skilled poetry. Rather than analyze these poetic texts as expressions of certain attitudes and judgments, however, historians have often used them as a source of inspiration or for polishing their narratives.¹⁰

Poetry and literature were always important for the historiographical portrayal of the life and times of Wenceslas IV. But despite his remarkable library, containing

MA, 2013; P. Rychterová, 'The Vernacular Theology of Jan Hus', in *A Companion to Jan Hus*, ed. F. Šmahel, Leiden, 2015, pp. 170–213; and idem, 'Preaching, the Vernacular and the Laity', in *A Companion to the Hussites*, eds P. Soukup and M. Van Dussen, Leiden, forthcoming. Frank Rexroth has come to similar conclusions in a paper presented at the conference 'Zwischen Widerstand und Umsturz. Zur Bedeutung von Gewalt für die politische Kultur des späten Mittelalters' organized by F. Rexroth, M. Kintzinger and J. Rogge in 2009. He pointed out that a new political public was formed in Western Europe after 1300, which formulated new ideas and opinions about governance while, at the same time, political theory and practice were merging.

⁸ For the ambivalent place of medieval vernacular texts in modern historiography, see P. Rychterová, 'Autoritát und Wahrheitsdiskurs im vernakularen katechetischen Schrifttum im spätmittelalterlichen Böhmen', in *Autoritát und Wahrheit. Kirchliche Vorstellungen, Normen und Verfahren 13. bis 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. G. L. Potestà, Munich, 2011, pp. 113–25.

⁹ For a clear analysis of such merging and its consequences, see F. Rexroth, 'Die Bilderwelt moderner Geschichtsschreibung und das mittelalterliche Imaginarium. Eine Studie über die Absetzung König Edwards II. von England 1327', in *Bilder der Macht*, pp. 361–88.

¹⁰ See, for instance, J. Spěváček, *Václav IV. 1361–1419. K předpokladům husitské revoluce*, Prague, 1986; M. Nejedlý, *Fortuny kolo vrtkavé. Láska, moc a společnost ve středověku*, Prague, 2003, pp. 387–409; L. Bobková and M. Bartlová, *Velké dějiny země Koruny české IVb (1310–1402)*, Prague/Litomyšl, 2003, pp. 275–405; and R. Novotný, 'Spor Václava IV. s panstvem', in *Lucemburkové. Česká koruna uprostřed Evropy*, eds F. Šmahel and L. Bobková, Prague, 2012, pp. 664–74.

many spectacular illuminated codices of Latin and vernacular prose and poetry, this ruler did not leave a legacy of encomiastic chronicles celebrating his reign.¹¹ Literary works that deal with his governance in the Roman Empire and in the kingdom of Bohemia have their origin outside of the royal court (or are the work of its renegades) and are anything but benevolent. The image of Wenceslas IV as a bad king that they convey took shape already during the first twenty years of his rule and was consolidated after his deposition from the imperial throne in 1400 and especially after the outburst of the armed Hussite revolt in Bohemia shortly before his death in 1419. Wenceslas' reputation created in contemporaneous literature soon became fixed in history: a king who managed to retain control neither of the empire nor of his own realm, and not even of his own university and a couple of stubborn clerics in it.¹² History put him down as an unfortunate drunkard and idler whose fate in restless times was a well-deserved failure.¹³

Wenceslas' reputation, in the form it had assumed already during his lifetime, has lasted practically up to the present day with a few changes.¹⁴ In modern historiography, Wenceslas is regarded as an incompetent and inefficient ruler, who had his share in provoking a decades-long 'crisis' into which the Central European monarchies plunged at the time.¹⁵ This crisis is supposed to have precipitated the 'end of the Middle Ages' and the establishment of the 'new world' of early modern Europe, with strong territorial lordship, a weak universal monarchy, and a Catholic Church that was no longer catholic (i.e., universal), since the Hussite revolt ended in the proclamation of a new, Utraquist, confession.

I am far from calling the time around 1400 a crisis of the late Middle Ages, as František Graus has done.¹⁶ But there is no doubt that it brought about a new

¹¹ J. Krása, *Rukopisy Václava IV.*, 2nd edn, Prague, 1974.

¹² The University of Prague was the leading authority in the first phase of the Hussite religious revolt; see F. Šmahel, 'Die Prager Universität und der Hussitismus', in *Die Prager Universität im Mittelalter: gesammelte Aufsätze—The Charles University in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies*, ed. idem, Leiden/Boston, 2007, pp. 172–95.

¹³ On the problem of Wenceslas IV's reputation in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, see especially P. Čornej, 'Dvojí tvář Václava IV', in idem, *Tajemství českých kronik. Cesty ke kořenům husitské tradice*, Prague, 1987, pp. 9–33.

¹⁴ See M. Kintzinger, 'Wenzel IV (1376–1400, † 1419)', in *Die deutschen Herrscher des Mittelalters. Historische Portraits von Heinrich I. bis Maximilian I. (919–1519)*, eds B. Schneidmüller and S. Weinfurter, Munich, 2003, pp. 433–45 (433).

¹⁵ See, for instance, J. M. Klassen, *The Nobility and the Making of the Hussite Revolution*, New York, 1978, pp. 47–60; Spěváček, *Václav IV.*; A. Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia: Czech Literature and Society, 1310–1420*, Minneapolis/London, 1998, pp. 125–33; and Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 219–45.

¹⁶ F. Graus, *Pest—Geißler—Judenmorde. Das 14. Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit*, Göttingen, 1987. Graus's concept was revealing at the time he was writing. Recent historiography and social sciences, however, have rendered the term 'crisis' problematic for several reasons; see R. Koselleck, 'Krise', in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. O. Brunner, vol. 3, Stuttgart, 1982, pp. 617–50.

constellation, especially, but not exclusively, for the kings of Bohemia and England. Their power to make decisions and their room for political maneuvering were notably smaller than those of their fathers. An important reason for this was of course the great papal Schism that had begun in 1378 and had disastrously undermined the carefully balanced European political game.¹⁷ For the rulers involved, it created in some sense a no-win situation because it demanded a choice between Roman and Avignonese obedience that one would have rather liked to avoid. But, paradoxically, avoiding a decision brought no advantages either. The longer the stalemate between the two camps lasted, the more difficult it became to maintain unscathed authority. Furthermore, besides traditional royal, princely, and ecclesiastical power centers, there were the cities and city leagues that had emerged as new power centers. These demanded completely new forms of negotiation, which not only the kings but also all the intellectual and political elites still had to learn. Wenceslas IV remained quite isolated on the imperial throne just two months after the outbreak of the Schism in September 1378—he had been elected Roman king by the prince-electors in 1376 and reigned together with his father, the emperor Charles IV, until the latter's death in November 1378. His father, an accomplished ruler and skilled diplomat, died quite suddenly and left his son with a burdensome heritage: the papal Schism not only made foreign policy immensely difficult but also complicated the internal affairs of both the empire and Bohemia. The princes of the Holy Roman Empire, as always, pursued their own interests and tried to derive as many advantages as possible from the confusing situation. Wenceslas followed an appeasement policy, postponing the decision on supporting one of the papal rivals as long as possible. This was basically reasonable, but it was torpedoed by his own chancellor, the young and ambitious archbishop of Prague, John of Jenstein, appointed to the Prague archbishopric in March 1379 by the Roman pope Urban VI. Pursuing the dream of his own holiness, he promptly proclaimed the loyalty of his archdiocese to Urban VI, and thus Wenceslas' tortuous maneuvering came to nothing.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the classical theory about the late medieval crisis still has its defenders today; see, for instance, H. Müller, *Die kirchliche Krise des Spätmittelalters*, Munich, 2012.

¹⁷ The elaborate means of political negotiation in the late Middle Ages can be demonstrated in the ceremonial proceedings of the visit of the Roman emperor Charles IV to the court of the French king Charles V in 1377; see F. Šmahel, *Cesta Karla IV. do Francie 1377–1378*, Prague, 2006.

¹⁸ John of Jenstein shaped his own life and the administration of his office on the model of the bishop of Prague and patron of Bohemia, Saint Adalbert (c. 957–997), who was described in his legends as a fierce defender of Church liberties against secular power. For Jenstein's pursuit for holiness, see P. Rychterová, 'Charisma und charismatische Legitimation in der Vita von Johannes von Jenstein', in *Kunst als Herrschaftsinstrument. Böhmen und das Heilige Römische Reich unter den Luxemburgern im europäischen Kontext*, eds J. Fajt and A. Langer, Berlin/Munich, 2009, pp. 346–53.

Alignment of the Roman king with the Roman pontiff was a slap in the face to the French king, and it was the French court poet Philippe de Mézières who delivered one of the first blows to Wenceslas' reputation. He had met the young King Wenceslas during Charles IV's visit to Paris a year prior to his death. Wenceslas apparently made a very poor impression on this fierce advocate of a new conquest of the Holy Land: according to Philippe's account, the seventeen-year-old youth was infinitely more interested in the African lions in the royal menagerie and even in the hopping rabbits in the royal game reserve than in all the schemes for a new crusade.¹⁹ In his work *Le songe du vieil pèlerin* (*The Dream of the Old Pilgrim*), written some ten years later at the end of the 1380s, Philippe sends six allegorical figures, the Dames Love, Hope, Truth, Peace, Justice, and Mercy, to Prague, among other destinations, in order to meet King Wenceslas. But the ruler declines to receive and look after his visitors, choosing instead to go off hunting. This is presented as unsurprising behavior for a king whose crown had been 'bought' for him from the electors by his father. Rather than properly governing his territories and cities, he spends his time chasing game with a crowd of favorites and violates the customary laws of the empire. What a contrast to the 'swift-footed stag', namely, the French king Charles VI, to whom the traveling virtues submit a tract on the ideal form of government at the end of the poem.²⁰ The Roman king serves the French poet as a foil against which the virtues of the actual addressee of his work should shine all the more—a technique with which a court poet, of all people, must have been very familiar. Every respectable work of courtly chivalric poetry employed such contrasts in abundance.²¹ The innovation here is that the bad example is not provided by a Saracen, a pagan ruler of the Old Testament, or a tyrannical emperor of ancient Rome but by one of the mightiest rulers of the West. Philippe's critique embodies already the most important elements that constituted the later judgment about Wenceslas: the king is depicted as a lazy ruler with doubtful legitimation who does not respect the established social order and therefore engages in all possible excesses.

At around the same time, the Carthusian Michael of Prague (c. 1377–1401) also depicted Wenceslas' conduct as a reason for general disorder. In 1387, he wrote a comprehensive mirror for princes for the Wittelsbach prince Rupert III of Pfalz (1352–1410) under the title *De regimine principum* (*On the Government of Princes*).²² The tract, divided into four books,²³ embodies in its structure the four cardinal

¹⁹ M. Nejedlý, *Fortuny kolo vrtkavé. Lásky, moc a společnost ve středověku*, Prague, 2003, p. 347.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 345–6.

²¹ I. Hensler, *Ritter und Sarrazin. Zur Beziehung von Fremd und Eigen in der hochmittelalterlichen Tradition der 'Chansons de gestes'*, Cologne, 2006, pp. 178–370.

²² E. Herrmann, 'Der Fürstenspiegel des Michael von Prag', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 91, 1971, pp. 22–45.

²³ The full title of the work is *Michaelis de Gyrio carthus. De regimine principum seu de quatuor virtutibus cardinalibus pro eruditione principum libri IV ad Ropertum juniorem Bavariae ducem*. It is transmitted in

virtues—prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude—with each book taking one virtue for its main theme. It is written in the form of a dialogue in which a questioner, indicated by the initial *R* for *Robertus*, poses questions to which he receives extensive answers. The main sources on which the author draws are the most important high medieval treatments of ‘good government’, namely, *De regimine principum*, also known as *De regno ad regem Cypri* (*On the Government of Princes*) (c. 1265–1273), by Thomas Aquinas,²⁴ and a text of the same name written some fifteen years later by Giles of Rome.²⁵ The essential purpose of Michael’s work is to define ‘the proper form and method of fulfilling the duty of the ruler and thereby the orientation of the *princeps* toward the standards of his position’,²⁶ the most important constituent parts of which were the Ten Commandments and Christian morals (since all lordly power ultimately came from the heavenly Lord). All necessary royal attributes could be derived from the four cardinal virtues—thus, a wise choice of advisers, for example, was defined as an expression of *prudence*—and their intended legacy would ensure government that was good as well as successful in its end results, constituting ‘a precondition for good administration, victory in warfare and the smooth running of state affairs.’²⁷

A negative foil to the royal virtues, which were laid out within the conceptual framework of the proper exercise of territorial lordship, is supplied in the tract by the wielder of supraregional lordship, the emperor. By reference to Old Testament stories (especially Amos 2:1–2, Jeremiah 8:1 and 11:7–10, and 2 Kings 23:16), and through graphic accounts of his moral failings (nightly debaucheries, contacts with

five manuscripts: Prague, Kapitulní knihovna, MS G 12; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Pal. lat. 725; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 11478 and 14347; Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS Lat. Qu. 30; see *The ‘De quatuor virtutibus cardinalibus pro eruditione principum’ of Michael the Carthusian of Prague*, ed. W. G. Storey, Salzburg, 1972, pp. 110–86. This edition contains only the Prologus, Capitulatio, and Book I; the rest of the text is available in *De quatuor virtutibus cardinalibus pro eruditione principum* (*Books II–IV*), ed. R. Witkowski, Salzburg, 2009. Unfortunately, there is no critical edition of the work based on all the transmitted manuscripts.

²⁴ See H. H. Bleakley, ‘The Art of Ruling in Aquinas’ *De regimine principum*, *History of Political Thought*, 20, 1999, pp. 575–602. For a general introduction to Aquinas’ political philosophy, see T. Gilby, *The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chicago, 1958; and J. Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, Oxford, 1998.

²⁵ For the relationship between Giles of Rome and Thomas Aquinas, see P. W. Nash, ‘Giles of Rome: Auditor and Critic of St Thomas’, *Modern Schoolman*, 28, 1950, pp. 1–20. For Giles’s *De regimine principum*, see primarily R. Lambertini, ‘Tra etica e politica: La *prudencia* del principe nel *De regimine* di Egidio Romano’, *Documenti e Studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 3:1, 1992, pp. 77–144; M. S. Kempsall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought*, Oxford, 1999, esp. pp. 130–56; and C. F. Briggs, *Giles of Rome’s De regimine principum: Reading and Writing Politics at Court and University*, c. 1275–c. 1525, Cambridge/New York, 1999. The substantial number of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular translations and paraphrases testifies to the work’s popularity especially at the universities and the courts of the European nobility.

²⁶ Herrmann, ‘Der Fürstenspiegel’, p. 40.

²⁷ Ibid.

dishonest people, alcoholism),²⁸ Michael of Prague shapes Wenceslas' bad reputation. 'Times have changed', the author laments. 'The virtues are repelled from the realm, which is devastated by proud men. In the old days their government was loved by all but now they are only seldom welcome guests.'²⁹ 'Justice has been exiled from jurisdiction, peace has fled with *equity*, the *fortitude* of those who now control the empire is expressed through injustice.'³⁰ Although not directly named, Wenceslas is the target of these and other more or less obvious insinuations. He thus plays the same role in the work of Michael of Prague as he does in the poem of Philippe de Mézières. The reasons for Michael's harsh criticism are nevertheless different from those of the French poet. Michael promotes Church liberties against secular power, *in concreto* for the Prague archbishop John of Jenstein, who was embroiled in a wearisome and escalating conflict with Wenceslas over land control, which ended in 1396 with Jenstein's resignation from the archbishopric. Furthermore, an important issue was the imperial provinces in Upper Swabia and Augsburg, which the king had granted to the Habsburgs in 1379, going over the heads of the Wittelsbachs in the process. Also important were the political ambitions of Rupert III and his father, Rupert II of Pfalz (1325–1398), which were fulfilled some ten years later: after the deposition of Wenceslas IV from the imperial throne, the prince electors chose Rupert as his successor. He did not manage the imperial affairs any more successfully than Wenceslas, but this did no damage to his reputation: the culprit for the general malaise had already been found in his predecessor.

According to his own report, Michael of Prague was entrusted with the task of writing a mirror for princes by Rupert III himself. He had probably been recommended to his patron by the leading intellectuals of Prague University, gathered around John of Jenstein, with whom Rupert cultivated close ties.³¹ Michael's judgment of Wenceslas could therefore combine the interests and views of two groups, namely, the high aristocracy of the empire and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Bohemia, which considered itself to have been especially affected by the policies of the king. These clerics were in a good position to formulate their critique on a level that could go far beyond concrete problems and complaints: from the individual judicial, political, and economic disagreements there gradually developed an almost Manichaean battle against tyranny, understood as the systematic disdain

²⁸ See F. Šmahel, 'Blasfemie rituálu? Tři pohřby krále Václava IV', in *Mezi středověkem a renesancí*, ed. idem, Prague, 2002, pp. 161–75.

²⁹ Herrmann, 'Der Fürstenspiegel', p. 42.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³¹ J. Hogg, 'Michael of Prague', in *Die Kartäuser in Österreich*, vol. 3, Salzburg, 1981, pp. 118–30; P. Spunar, *Repertorium auctorum bohemorum provecum idearum post Universitatem Pragensem conditam illustrans I*, Wrocław, 1985, pp. 77–9.

for the Christian virtues of rulership, and Wenceslas came to be seen as the very personification of vice. Thus, individual experiences and particular interests could be reconciled within the all-embracing horizon of Christian moral teaching as elaborated in the agenda-setting works of the mirror for princes genre, such as the treatises by Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome. The reception, interpretation, and application of the doctrine of the good king offered a possibility to bring a confusing state of affairs under control, that is, it could help (and did help) to portray the numerous and often unrelated problems that arose in political practice as fitting into, and representing, a transcendental scheme of things. This intellectual strategy, pioneered in Latin treatises, can also be detected in later vernacular mirrors for princes.

During the 1380s and 1390s, three vernacular mirrors for princes were produced in Bohemia: these were no longer written by priests or regulars but by laymen who were members of the higher and lower Bohemian nobility. One is part of a Czech translation of a slightly earlier work dealing with issues of kingship, the *Revelationes* of Saint Bridget of Sweden;³² the other an elaborate poem, the so-called *Nová rada* (*New Council of the Animals*) written in the 1390s;³³ and the third a more or less loose Czech translation of the *Liber de ludo scaccorum sive de moribus hominum et de officiis nobilium* (*The Book of Chess*) by the Genoan Dominican Jacobus de Cessolis,³⁴ written around 1400.³⁵

The understanding of the moral (or, conversely, immoral) exercise of rulership in the Czech translation of Bridget's visions and in the *Book of Chess* coincides fairly precisely with the catalog of royal virtues and vices elaborated by Michael of Prague. Both texts offer a condensed (and practically identical) vernacular description of the ideal ruler and his 'bad' counterpart, structured as a series of warnings and rhetorical questions. In both, the king is described as preeminent among all. He should therefore be recognizable by his grand vestments and be careful that he never shows himself to be unworthy, in order that everyone might honor and praise him. The

³² A critical edition of the medieval Czech translation of Bridget's *Revelations* is available in *Vidění svaté Brigity Švédské v překladu Tomáše ze Štítného*, ed. P. Rychterová, Prague, 2009; see also P. Rychterová, *Die 'Revelationes' der heiligen Birgitta von Schweden (1303–1373) in der altschechischen Übersetzung des Thomas von Štítné (ca. 1330–1409)*, Cologne/Weimar, 2004. For the Latin text of the relevant chapters of the *Revelations*, see *Sancta Birgitta: Revelationes, Book VIII*, ed. H. Aili, Uppsala, 2002; and H. Aili, 'Alfonso's Editorial Work in the *Liber ad reges*: A Pitfall for Vernacular Translators?', in *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, eds B. Morris and V. O'Mara, Turnhout, 2000, pp. 25–42.

³³ P. Rychterová, 'Hör zu, König, der du meinen Rat verlangst!' Das richtige Regiment in der altschechischen Literatur der zweiten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts', in *Thinking Politics in the Vernacular*, pp. 129–48.

³⁴ O. Plessow, *Mittelalterliche Schachzabelbücher zwischen Spielsymbolik und Wertevermittlung. Der Schachtraktat des Jacobus de Cessolis im Kontext seiner spätmittelalterlichen Rezeption*, Münster, 2007, pp. 46–51.

³⁵ Thomas of Štítné, *Knižky o hře šachové a jiné*, ed. F. Šimek, Prague, 1956; *Knižky o hře šachové*, ed. F. Menčík, Prague, 1879.

king should be aware of his human dignity and suppress the animalistic cravings and habits that exist within him. Where will the king end up if he allows himself to be ruled by anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth, and abandons steadfastness and temperance? Sycophants divert him from justice, craving from him the property of orphans and widows. The king should be aware that he is a man, not a fearsome bear or fretful hare, an ever-bathing goose, or a meddlesome ape. The king should also avoid empty verbiage and instead practice a dignified reticence. He should abstain from the company of lowly and unworthy people and surround himself with the great and nobly born. A poor servant will only seek to enrich himself, but a noble servant will use his own resources to carry out his duties correctly. The ruler, moreover, should be merciful toward his domestics and always observe the truth, also expressing his promises in a way that can be easily understood. He should live in matrimony and look after his offspring. He should sit high on his throne, see far, destroy injustice and capriciousness with his glance, be a shield to the good and a hammer to the bad. He should choose his advisers only from among the wise, avoiding misers and usurers. The royal position is holy only if the king serves God in the royal office, demands peace for all, and benefits others more than himself. Four virtues should adorn the king, namely, restraint, temperance, justice, and constancy. A king who does not bear these four jewels in his crown does not rule lawfully. But when the king cultivates these four virtues, he will not lose his kingdom with death but will pass into a better life, and the world will remember his name with honor and praise.³⁶

The translation of the *Book of Chess* expands this register of vices and virtues with a few additional formulations. The first of these additions is at the same time the only concrete example of royal (=Wenceslas') injustice given in the text. It complains about the Achilles heel of all noble existence in the late Middle Ages, namely, the escheat, which was a prime cause of the rebellion of landed nobles against the king.³⁷ The second addition also conveys the author's perception of his own time. The sentence on the heavenly reward of a good ruler and his honorable remembrance is followed by a remark of the type that often appears in the exemplary phrases of the Latin original:

³⁶ *Vidění svatě Brigity Švédské*, pp. 215–17.

³⁷ In 1395 the resisting lords managed to extract a promise from the king that he would pay heed to one of the central royal virtues and protect widows and orphans, meaning that he would give up his right to appropriate estates for which there was no male heir in the direct line. The economic and political conflict was inflated in such a way that it left Wenceslas little room to maneuver, and he capitulated—at the same time allowing a large step toward his identification with the catalog of vices contained in mirrors for princes; see Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 148.

And do you [= the reader] suppose that there would be peace in our kingdom, were it not for the manner of our gallant Emperor Charles, the king of Bohemia? Only after his passing did injustice spread, and sorrow and contrition are still to come.³⁸

King Wenceslas is not yet named as the cause of this evil, but from the essentially apocalyptic interpretation of the time after the death of Charles IV in 1378 to the personification of the disaster it takes but a single step. Against the background of Emperor Charles IV's glowing legacy, it seemed all the more natural to paint his successor in dark colors, also because the latter made no efforts to define his own image for posterity. Charles IV had initiated and financed numerous chronicles that vaunted his rule over Bohemia and the empire; he also contributed a remarkable autobiography. The reign of his son lacked a homogeneous contemporary narrative that would ensure a positive interpretation of his rule from the perspective of the court and could serve contemporaries, later chroniclers, and also modern historians as a handbook and background image for their own deliberations.

A literary work has come to fill this historiographical gap, namely, the previously mentioned *New Council of the Animals*.³⁹ It is a versified allegory about a parliament of animals that has been commanded to assemble by the king, the lion, in order to supply him with advice on how best to exercise lordship over the land. Every mammal and bird comes one by one before the king, expressing, according to their nature, their opinion on the proper conduct of rulership.⁴⁰ Each piece of advice accords to the virtue or vice that the respective animal represents. I have already mentioned the fearsome bear, fretful hare, ever-bathing goose, and meddlesome ape, which are some of the most common metaphors for the bad king in the *Book of Chess*. In the *New Council* we can find the same characteristics of the ideal ruler as in the other two texts, as well as their negative counterparts, discussed in detail. The poem therefore not only offers a concise overview of the doctrine of the good king but also features its own corresponding lore of the bad king. The latter, however, does not contain any philosophical or theologically based definition of tyranny. Some of the 'bad king' speeches refer to widespread social injustices (the speech of the crane, for instance), while some are directed against specific governmental decisions (the speeches of the wolf, the vulture, and the fox), and some are

³⁸ *Knížky o hře šachové*, pp. 17–18.

³⁹ Smil Flaška, *Nová rada*, ed. J. Daňhelka, Prague, 1950; see also Z. Tichá, 'Smil Flaška z Pardubic a Rychmburku', in *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce 1 A–G*, eds V. Frost et al., Prague, 1985, pp. 717–18, with extensive bibliography.

⁴⁰ On the symbolic meanings of animals in the Middle Ages, see, for example, J. Voisenet, *Bêtes et hommes dans le monde médiéval. Le bestiaire des clercs du V^e au XII^e siècle*, Turnhout, 2000, pp. 353–410.

parodies of the king's personal habits (the speeches of the goose, the hare, and the dog). Indeed, the old-Czech poem unfolds as a sort of literary game, taking a cue from other primarily vernacular literary texts of the time, such as the *Parlement of Foules* by Geoffrey Chaucer, which the author obviously knew.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the playful representation of the bad king accompanied by the sober discourse on royal virtue may be one reason modern scholars regard the work not only as more valuable than other texts of the genre produced at that time in Bohemia but also as more 'true to life', that is, as a text that reflects a 'real' historical situation rather than a 'fictional' one: the opposition to the bad king in the narrative may be very easily misunderstood as an opposition of 'fiction' and 'reality'. Another reason is the persuasive force of direct speech and verbal exchange, that is, the dialogic form of the literary text: the dialogue of the animals, their 'parliament', conjures up a literary 'public' that at first glance appears to be an approximation of a 'real' public. Many historians go so far in their efforts to reconstruct this 'real' public that behind each animal and bird they look for an actual personality from the political life of the country.⁴² Finally, the perception of the *New Council* as a mirror of reality seems to be reinforced by the social standing of its author, whose fate is well documented: he was killed on 13 August 1403 during the siege of Kuttenberg, a city loyal to the king, but before that he held the position of chief notary at the court of the Bohemian estates and was among the leading personalities of the antiroyal alliance of lords. Hence, the *New Council* is not considered by historians to be a primarily 'literary' work, but an actual message to the king that contained a concrete depiction of his behavior and of the condition of the Bohemian kingdom, along with suggestions for improving the situation, all disguised as an allegory in verse. The authors of the second half of the fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century, for instance Pavel Židek⁴³ or Viktorin Kornel from Všehrdy,⁴⁴ for whom the time of King Wenceslas had already become 'history', arrived at the same conclusion.

⁴¹ Nejedlý, *Fortuny kolo vrtkavé*, pp. 387–409; A. Kraus, 'K Smilově "Nové radě"', *Listy filologické*, 31, 1904, pp. 199–212; P. M. Haškovec, 'Některá témata literatur západních v českém písemnictví', *Listy filologické*, 43, 1916, p. 266.

⁴² See, for instance, Klassen, *The Nobility and the Making of the Hussite Revolution*, p. 51, where the *New Council* is characterized as one of the sources 'which reflect the king's efforts to weaken the power of the noble estate'; cf. also Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia*, p. 127: 'The . . . *New Council* . . . mirrors the author's . . . attitude toward Wenceslas after fifteen years of alleged misrule. Here negative, ironic counsels alternate with positive ones, the former reflecting the presence of foreigners and upstarts in the king's council. Many of these satirical speeches express the author's aversion to royal policy and the king's alleged personal peccadilloes: indolence, fondness of alcohol, love of public baths.' One should be careful, however, not to take the literary construction of the public debate in the text as a direct representation of actual opinions voiced in real circumstances.

⁴³ See below, n. 47.

⁴⁴ J. Kolár, 'Viktorin Kornel ze Všehrd', in *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce 4/U–Ž, Dodatky A–Ř*, eds L. Merhaut et al., Prague, 2008, pp. 1531–2.

In any case, the author of the *New Council* and his contemporaries were able to employ the doctrine of the good king as an argument in political struggle. These noblemen constituted the first generation of their class for whom a few years of university education were no longer an exception. Indeed, Prague University, founded in 1348, brought the possibility of a higher education within reach of all noble families in Bohemia, and not only the richest ones. This allowed them to express themselves in the field of Christian ethics more confidently than had hitherto been possible. They did so in their own language, not in the language shared by the intellectual elite of the Church, and they did it in their own way and for their own purposes. Thus, at the end of the fourteenth century, the high medieval model of the royal virtues and vices was increasingly being used as an instrument to describe and contextualize specific economic and political problems. During the reign of Wenceslas IV in particular, many groups were simultaneously making use of this mode of interpretation. The noble author of the *New Council*, Michael of Prague, Rupert III of Pfalz, and the French poet Philippe de Mézières all believed that they had reasons to bear a grudge against the Roman and Bohemian king, and they expressed it with a direct reference to the catalog of virtues and vices, primarily formulated within the theological discourse that originated with Aquinas and Giles of Rome. By moving from Latin to the vernacular, this catalog lost its exclusivity and became part of the political discourse. This brought with it new hierarchies and reinterpretations for the individual components of the model of royal virtues and also limited the possibilities of the representation of the ruler: we detect, for example, an increasingly negative view of a previously essential attribute of kingship, namely, the hunt. At the close of the fourteenth century, it was no longer likely that a ruler would come across a saint while engaged in this noble pastime, something that had happened frequently several centuries earlier, as many early and high medieval legends inform us.⁴⁵ A late medieval ruler, as far as his university-educated, business-minded contemporaries were concerned, ought to perch obligingly on his throne and attend to his official duties.

The legacy of Wenceslas IV, king of Bohemia and emperor-elect, seems to have assumed its final negative form at the end of the fifteenth century. The outbreak of the Hussite revolt immediately before the death of the ruler in 1419 and the subsequent religious war allowed all Bohemians, along with chroniclers and annalists on the other side of the border, to judge the rule of Wenceslas from the perspective of the struggle with the Hussite heresy. There was only one isolated attempt by an

⁴⁵ In Bohemia the hunting ruler—Přemyslid duke Udalrich—appears in the legend of one of the patrons of the realm, Saint Procopius. Czech versions of the legend were very popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; see V. Chaloupecký and B. Ryba, *Středověké legendy prokopské. Jejich historický rozbor a texty*, Prague, 1953.

unknown Hussite chronicler in the middle of the fifteenth century to depict the life and times of King Wenceslas in a highly positive way. The passage fulfilled the role of a foil to the depiction of many turbulent and violent events during the Hussite wars in Bohemia that were the main topic of the chronicle. In the story, the king visits his subjects under an alias and takes care of justice himself. His rule is characterized as an idyllic past in which it was possible for a virgin to travel across the land alone with a golden nugget on the top of her head without being molested even once.⁴⁶ But, on the other hand, the older patterns of interpretation were reinforced at that time—so much so that in the remarkable work on ideal kingship written in Czech by a university-educated Catholic priest in 1471,⁴⁷ Wenceslas is portrayed as the incarnation of all seven deadly sins:

Many evil things came about because of King Wenceslas. First, when he was two years old, that is in the year thirteen hundred and fifty-three, he was crowned [king of Bohemia] in the castle [at Prague]; and at that moment he cried a great deal and soiled with excrement the altar of Saint Maurice, upon which he was standing as they crowned him.⁴⁸ He only calmed himself when a baker gave him a sweet bun. . . . And in Nuremberg, too, where he was born, he urinated in the baptismal font when they baptized him. Second, he was a gluttonous sot. Third, he mounted virgins and married women whenever he pleased; once he became impotent, he commanded his favorite to sin before his eyes, in order that he too might become lustful. Fourth, he loved hunting dogs, hunting knives and bows and fell into slovenliness. Fifth, he harbored wicked thoughts about his wife, and went to her confessor, and demanded to know with whom she was cuckolding him. The confessor, however, refused to tell him anything and the king had him drowned.⁴⁹ . . . Sixth, when Jan Hus started denouncing the priests in front of people, which he was not allowed

⁴⁶ F. Graus, 'Goldenes Zeitalter. Zeitschelte und Lob der guten alten Zeit. Zu nostalgischen Strömungen im Spätmittelalter', in *František Graus: Ausgewählte Aufsätze (1959–1989)*, eds H.-J. Gilomen, P. Moraw, and R. C. Schwinges, Stuttgart, 2002, pp. 93–130.

⁴⁷ *M. Pavla Židka Správozna*, ed. Z. V. Tobolka, Prague, 1908; see also J. Grygiel, 'Ideal władcy średniowiecznego w dziele Pavla Židka Správozna Jiřího krále', in *Pismennictwo Czech i Polski w średniowieczu i we wczesnej epoce nowożytnej*, eds A. Barciak and W. Iwańczak, Katowice, 2006, pp. 329–41. The genre of mirrors for princes was reconfigured at the end of the fifteenth century in Bohemia and openly used as a tool in the political and religious struggle between the Catholics and Utraquists who shared control of the realm. A characteristic example is the treatise of a Catholic scholar, Hilarius of Leitmeritz, written in Czech in the last third of the fifteenth century; see *Hilaria Litoměřického traktát k panu Janovi z Rožmberka*, ed. Z. V. Tobolka, Prague, 1898.

⁴⁸ The coronation ceremony of Wenceslas had indeed been organized by his father when he was two years old; see *Korunovační řád českých králů*, eds J. Kuthan and M. Šmied, Prague, 2009.

⁴⁹ For the cult of John of Pomuk (Nepomuk), who was killed by the king's men in 1393 in the course of political struggle between the king and the archbishop of Prague, John of Jenstein, see V. Vlnas, *Jan Nepomucký. Česká*

to do because the clergy had their own courts and law, it pleased the king. And when the canons brought lavish gifts to the king in order to forbid Hus to preach, the king said: 'Oh, the good Hus [= English 'goose'] has laid me a golden egg!'⁵⁰

As was the case with Michael of Prague, the author of the *New Council*, or the translator of *The Book of Chess* before him, Pavel Židek's attacks were effectively grounded in the age-old tradition of royal virtues and vices. Indeed, the gradual introduction of the doctrine of the good king in the European vernaculars in the second half of the fourteenth century had a multilayered impact on the political discourse of the time. The presumed audience of these texts, educated noblemen and the urban oligarchy, introduced new forms of communication, and soon was able to express itself in this field with a high level of abstraction. They broke the political discourse open to many different forms of appropriation, which could no longer be controlled by a single group of interpreters. New means of political communication influenced the possibilities of royal representation and the modes of negotiation between the sovereign and his subjects, his allies and enemies. This development impacted the careers of the European monarchs at the end of the fourteenth century, in the sense that the public perception and evaluation of their conduct played an ever more important role. Rulers could not shape their own reputation and memory as their fathers had done. They lived in a paradox: while their political dominance was steadily decreasing, their deeds and decisions were evaluated ever more closely and by a growing and increasingly politicized environment. Vernacular political writings such as the inverted mirrors devoted to Wenceslas IV are products and expressions of this change in the distribution of political power and knowledge in late medieval Europe. However, as reflections of the king's character, they turn out to be not only inverted but quite crooked mirrors onto the past.

legenda, Prague, 1993; see also J. V. Polc, 'S. Jean Nepomuk (ou de Pomuk) a bien existé et il est vraiment mort martyr', *L'ami du clergé*, 72, 1962, pp. 636–40.

⁵⁰ *Výbor z české literatury doby husitské*, eds B. Havránek, J. Hrabák, and J. Daňhelka, vol. 2, Prague, 1964, pp. 187–8.

'I Don't Know Who You Call Tyrants'

DEBATING EVIL LORDS IN QUATTROCENTO HUMANISM

Hester Schadee



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN HUMANISM has produced few systematic discussions of tyranny from a legal-philosophical perspective that can compare with the theoretical treatments of the high and late Middle Ages.¹ While it is true that some texts of this type were composed in the Quattrocento—one thinks, for instance, of Coluccio Salutati's *De tyranno* (1400) and Girolamo Savonarola's *Trattato sul governo di Firenze* (1497–8)—these works are outliers in terms of their approaches as much as their dates.² Typically, Quattrocento

¹ In Italy, most notably Thomas Aquinas and his continuator Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum* (c. 1265–c. 1300) and Giles of Rome's treatise of the same name (c. 1280); Dante, *De monarchia* (1310s); Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis* (1324); and Bartolus of Sassoferrato, *De tyranno* (1340s–1350s); in Transalpine Europe, John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (c. 1159) and William Ockham, *Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico* (1340s). See e.g. J. M. Blythe, *On the Government of Rulers: De Regimine Principum. Ptolemy of Lucca, with portions attributed to Thomas Aquinas*, Philadelphia, 1997; R. W. Dyson, *Giles of Rome's On Ecclesiastical Power: Medieval Theory of World Government*, New York, 2004; V. Syros, *Marsilius of Padua at the Intersection of Ancient and Medieval Traditions of Political Thought*, Toronto, 2012; F. Maiolo, *Medieval Sovereignty: Marsilius of Padua and Bartolus of Saxoferrato*, Delft, 2007; C. J. Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, Tempe, 2005; A. S. McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham: Personal and Institutional Principles*, Cambridge/New York, 1998; and *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns, Cambridge/New York, 1988; Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, Cambridge/New York, 1978, pp. 49–65; and R. Black, 'Communes and Despots: Some Italian and Transalpine Thinkers', in *Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds J. E. Law and B. Patton, Farnham, 2010, pp. 49–59, for an overview.

² In addition, some fifteenth-century treatises include a brief theoretical section, e.g., Bartolomeo Sacchi, *Bartholomaei Platinae De Principe*, ed. G. Ferrau, Palermo, 1979, l.1 'Unus sit princeps' (1471–4); Francesco

humanism treats political philosophy as a branch of moral philosophy, and humanist reflections on the nature of lordship occur in the context of ethics, often in the ‘applied genres’ of epideictic oratory and educational literature. Like other areas of humanist writing, the discourse on tyranny witnesses a direct return to the classics, especially Cicero, Seneca, and Aristotle, the latter ostensibly stripped of his scholastic commentary.³

The present chapter examines the consequences of this realignment. The changes in discipline (moral philosophy rather than law or political theory in the strict sense) and in literary format (speeches, dialogues, letters, and treatises aimed at persuasion rather than codification) suggest two areas for exploration.⁴ First, one should not expect fifteenth-century humanists to pay attention to the definition of a bad prince or tyrant in the manner of their Trecento predecessors. Instead, their focus will inevitably be on the personal morality of the ruler. Yet does that mean that the dichotomy between good and bad types of government is jettisoned entirely? The traditional hallmarks of non-tyrannical rule—concern for the common good, the laws, and love for the people—were, it has rightly been pointed out, also essentially moral; but crucially, they functioned as objective and externally verifiable principles.⁵ The question, then, is whether the ‘moral turn’ of humanist political theory abolished these criteria—that is, factors with a purchase beyond the ruler’s internal psychology—as markers of an evil lord. Investigation of these issues sheds light on the extent to which humanist discussions of tyranny preserve the paradigms of the inherited traditions.

The second cluster of questions pertains to the literary and political contexts in which humanist discourse on good and bad government was produced. The literary nature of these writings, and the demands posed by their various genres, had the potential to influence form as well as argument. The two are, in fact, intertwined, and the ramifications of this observation merit thought. Furthermore, epideictic and didactic writings were frequently composed with a specific dedicatee in mind,

Patrizi da Siena, *De institutione reipublicae libri IX*, Paris, 1534, I.1 ‘Praestantiorne sit respublica an unius principis imperium’ (1470s); and Aurelio Lippo Brandolini, *Republics and Kingdoms Compared*, ed. and transl. J. Hankins, Cambridge, MA, 2009, III.85–9; 95 (1492–4).

³ For discussions of tyranny: Arist. *Pol.* esp. 3.1278b6–1279b20; 1284b35–1288b1; 1295a1–1295a24; 1310a39–1315b10; Cic. *Off.* esp. 1.26; 1.42–44; 1.112; 2.2–3; 2.23–8; 2.41–2; 2.52–56; 3.29–32; 3.40; 3.90; Sen. *Clem.* 1.3, 3–4; 1.5, 1–3; 1.11.4–1.14.3; 1.20.1–1.26.5, and *Ira* 1.2.3–3a; 2.11.3–4; 2.23.1.

⁴ It is not self-evident that ‘political treatises’ carry greater weight as vehicles for Quattrocento political thought than other genres, *vide* Leonardo Bruni’s oration *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* (1404) and his dialogue *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* (c. 1407) or Guarino Veronese’s epistles to Leonello d’Este (1430s–1450).

⁵ See the chapters by Nino Luraghi and Cary J. Nederman in this volume.

who was usually socially or professionally superior to the author, and not uncommonly himself a prince. One might expect authors operating within a courtly setting to be especially invested in separating the good prince from the bad, while those working outside the patronage of a court may have had less incentive to do so. It should therefore be considered whether ‘princely humanists’ and ‘civic humanists’ differ in their ambition to define tyranny, and especially what means they seize upon to achieve this.⁶

As the above indicates, humanist thought on good and bad rule moves within fairly strict parameters. Nonetheless, there is ample scope for, sometimes subtle, variations. The aims of this chapter—which I hope will be complementary rather than contradictory—are both to document the shared features that characterize Quattrocento theories of tyranny and to pinpoint areas of divergence between authors, or even between individual texts by the same author. To this end, it examines four texts by two writers from, respectively, the first and second half of the fifteenth century, and from republican and monarchic ambits. The first of these, Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), was educated in the Republic of Florence and resided there again from 1433 to 1436 as secretary to Pope Eugene IV; during both periods he moved in the circles of Leonardo Bruni, Niccolò Niccoli, Carlo Marsuppini, and other luminaries of Florentine civic humanism, and he became a close friend of Cosimo de’ Medici. Upon retirement from the Curia in 1452, he returned to the city, taking up the Florentine chancellorship the year after.⁷ The younger author, Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503), was a protégé of Antonio Beccadelli (also called Panormita) at the court of Alfonso I of Naples and spent his adult years as tutor and secretary to a succession of kings and princes of the Aragonese dynasty.⁸ Poggio’s *De infelicitate principum* is the fullest treatment of bad princes produced in the Quattrocento: an analysis of this text will serve as cornerstone, and the other works will be compared to it and to each other.

⁶ Werner Gundersheimer used ‘courtly humanism’ as a counterpart to Hans Baron’s ‘civic humanism’, on which see n. 19 below, in *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism*, Princeton, 1973, whereas Benjamin Kohl coined the term ‘subdital humanism’, ‘Political Attitudes of North Italian Humanists in the Late Trecento’, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 4, 1974, pp. 418–27. Criticism of this terminology has not invalidated the distinction, but perhaps the designations are more usefully applied according to the dedicatee rather than the author of a humanist text. See also *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. J. Hankins, Cambridge/New York, 2000.

⁷ E. Walser, *Poggius Florentinus: Leben und Werke*, Leipzig, 1914; R. Fubini, *Poggio Bracciolini 1380–1980: Nel VI centenario della nascita*, Florence, 1982.

⁸ L. Monti Sabia, *Un profilo moderno e due Vitae antiche di Giovanni Pontano*, Naples, 1998; C. Kidwell, *Pontano: Poet and Prime Minister*, London, 1991.

POGGIO'S *DE INFELICITATE PRINCIPUM*

Poggio Bracciolini's *De infelicitate principum* (*On the Unhappiness of Princes*) is a dialogue addressed to his fellow papal servant Tommaso Parentucelli, the future Pope Nicholas V.⁹ It was written in 1440 but set in Florence in 1434, the year in which Cosimo de' Medici—who is one of the speakers—was recalled from exile, in other words, the year of the inauguration of Medici rule.¹⁰ The text may be viewed as an 'anti-mirror for princes' because the unhappiness of princes that the title refers to is primarily the result of lack of virtue, so that *De infelicitate* is a treatise on princely vice. There is, to be sure, a second line of argument, namely, that if a prince is virtuous—an exceedingly rare situation—the burdens of office still conspire to make him unhappy. But this is something of an afterthought or a concession.¹¹ For the present purposes, the question 'What makes a prince unhappy?' is answered with 'The fact that he is bad', and 'What makes a prince bad?' with 'The fact that he is a prince'. Although nominally a dialogue, the work presents a barely interrupted lecture by one of the speakers, Niccolò Niccoli, and the preface implies that he by and large voices Poggio's own opinions.¹² Nonetheless, the dialogue form allows for the introduction of other perspectives. Perhaps the most crucial exchange takes place when Niccolò's interlocutor Carlo Marsuppini challenges him by introducing the distinction between good and bad princes. Niccolò's analysis of vice and consequent unhappiness is not in itself incorrect, Marsuppini proposes, but it pertains to tyrants, not to kings. The former are indeed tormented by abundant vices, and so must be unhappy.¹³ Kings, on the other hand,

who reign with fair and sound judgment for the common good—their condition seems to be far different. Since they are instruments of the laws and of justice, and exert themselves not for private but for public gain, since they foster peace, set limits to their desires, and cultivate learned men, since they merit to

⁹ Poggio Bracciolini, *De infelicitate principum*, ed. D. Canfora, Rome, 1998. An Italian translation is available in Poggio Bracciolini, *L'infelicità dei principi*, transl. D. Canfora, Palermo, 1999. An English translation is forthcoming in Poggio Bracciolini, *On Princes and Tyrants*, eds and transls H. Schadee and K. Sidwell, with D. Rundle, Cambridge, MA. All translations in this chapter are my own.

¹⁰ D. Kent, *The Rise of the Medici: Faction in Florence, 1426–1434*, Oxford, 1978; N. Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434–1494)*, Oxford, 1966.

¹¹ Poggio, *Infelicitate*, ch. 81 of 103.

¹² This is confirmed by Poggio's 1440 letter to his friend Richard Petworth, cited in I. Kajanto, 'Poggio Bracciolini's *De Infelicitate Principum* and Its Classical Sources', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 1:1, 1994, pp. 23–35 (33).

¹³ "Tyrannorum" inquit "non regnum aut imperatorum vita iis cruciabitur que dixisti malis, quoniam et Iustinus affirmat tyrannos semper vitiis abundare; ideoque et esse infelices necesse est", Poggio, *Infelicitate*, ch. 34.

be called almost the parents of those they lead, what is lacking for them to be deemed, and indeed to be, happy?¹⁴

Here Marsuppini lays out the three Aristotelian tenets of benevolent autocracy, that is to say, monarchy: the king applies the law, serves the common good, and is a father to his people—all of which differentiate him from his tyrannical counterpart.¹⁵ Niccolò's response is a calculated snub to this tradition. Instead of engaging with Marsuppini's evocation of this other, regal category of rulers, he simply denies its existence and collapses the distinction between kings and tyrants:

I don't know who you call tyrants. But this we know for sure, that some of them were better than kings, and exercised their power more justly toward their subjects. For they are distinguished not by name but by substance. And truly, if you weigh the life and morals of kings, emperors and other rulers, you will find many who deserve the name of tyrants rather than kings.¹⁶

Poggio owes a debt to Cicero's *De officiis* (*On Duties*), the ancient authority who does not hypothesize a good form of autocracy. The formulation derives from Seneca's *De clementia* (*On Mercy*), whose investment in the ruler's character Niccolò advances as a substitute for Aristotle's distinction according to law and other external characteristics.¹⁷ He then proceeds to appropriate the other topoi of the Aristotelian discourse on tyranny and to apply these to all rulers, king and tyrant alike. Thus, he adduces, for instance, lack of care for the common good as an innate feature of any prince.¹⁸

A second qualification to Niccolò's invective is introduced by Cosimo de' Medici. Appropriately, he wants to know whether those who are 'first citizens' in a republic

¹⁴ 'At vero ceterorum, qui recto iustoque iudicio pro communi utilitate regnant, longe alia videtur esse conditio, qui, cum sint legum ac iustitiae ministri, nec privato, sed publico commodo dent operam, cum pacem colant, cupiditatibus statuunt modum, viros doctos ament, cum quasi parentes eorum quibus presunt appellari mereantur, quid his abest quin et dici et esse felices queant?', *ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf. n. 1.

¹⁶ 'Quos tu quidem tyrannos appelles, nescio. Hoc certo scimus, nonnullos eorum fuisse regibus meliores iustiusque in subditos imperium exercuisse. Non enim nomine, sed re distinguuntur. Veruntamen si recte regum, imperatorum ceterorumque principantium vitam ac mores perpendes, dignos reperiis permultos, qui tyrannorum potius quam regum nomen mereantur', Poggio, *De infelicitate*, ch. 37.

¹⁷ 'Tyrannus autem a rege factis distat, non nomine', Sen. *Clem.* 1.12.1, and see R. Kaster's comment *ad loc.* in Seneca, *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. R. Kaster and M. Nussbaum, Chicago, 2010. It is noteworthy that Niccolò uses the language of scholasticism for this negation of Aristotle, replacing Seneca's opposition of *nomen* and *factum* with the contrast between *nomen* and *res*: this may be one of the ironies characteristic of this sardonic speaker.

¹⁸ Poggio, *De infelicitate*, ch. 48.

should be excluded from the crowd of unhappy princes. The expected answer would be affirmative, seeing that the opposition between virtuous republicanism and ignominious monarchy is a staple of Florentine political discourse.¹⁹ Niccolò, perhaps prudently, leaves it to those ‘who have experienced that situation’ to decide how happy they are, but a long list of republican leaders from Greek and Roman history who died unhappily intimates his opinion.²⁰ These men were wretched either because they were vicious and inflicted cruelty on their compatriots, as was true for both Sulla and Marius, or instead because political enemies or the foolish mob begrudged them a worthy ending—a fate that befell Scipio Africanus and was only narrowly avoided by Cosimo himself.²¹ By explicitly referencing these two different grounds for the unhappiness of republican ‘first men,’ Niccolò avoids offending the sensibilities of those present, in the same way that the author Poggio avoids alienating part of his audience. But he gives no indication that the reader should believe the leaders of republics to be exempt from the vices that torment princes. In fact, the inclusion of pairs of mortal enemies—besides Sulla and Marius also Scipio and Hannibal, and Caesar and Pompey—strengthens the impression that Niccolò is not interested in the specificity of any case. Instead, he seeks to paint a bigger picture, which encompasses all those who hold power.²²

In conflating kings and tyrants, *De infelicitate* countervails Aristotle and the medieval tradition dependent on him, reinstating instead Cicero and Seneca.²³ However, Niccolò flies in the face of the Roman tradition when he absorbs republican leaders in the same category, including all three under the header of ‘princes.’ Seneca, naturally, was not concerned with republican statesmen; but Cicero and his contemporaries habitually labeled opposing magistrates or tribunes as *rex* (king) precisely to suggest their tyrannical tendencies.²⁴ That is to say, in the Roman Republic, the standard maneuver for restyling a politician as tyrant was to associate him with a different constitutional system. *De infelicitate* shows no concern for such constitutional distinctions and freely applies the concept of tyranny to leading men

¹⁹ The locus classicus is Leonardo Bruni’s *Laudatio Florentinae urbis*; the classic analysis is H. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, Princeton, 1955, but cf. nn. 4 and 6.

²⁰ Poggio, *De infelicitate*, chs 93–4, “Decernant hoc ipsemet”, inquit, “qui, quanta illis felicitas tribui debeat, experti sunt”.

²¹ See n. 10 above.

²² This perspective explains Poggio’s choice of exemplars, often found to be odd in itself, and odd in relation to his other writings, esp. the *Caesar-Scipio Controversy* discussed below; see e.g. Kajanto, ‘*De Infelicitate Principum* and Its Classical Sources’, p. 30; D. Canfora, *Prima di Machiavelli. Politica e cultura in età umanistica*, Bari, 2005, pp. 29–30.

²³ See the chapter by Cary J. Nederman in this volume.

²⁴ See the chapter by Yelena Baraz in this volume.

in republics. This disregard for constitutional differences is, I believe, typical for much humanist political discourse and warrants discussion outside the context of this chapter.²⁵

The question that remains to be answered is why, according to Niccolò, all autocrats act tyrannically. He proposes two arguments that show the certainty of that scenario, both relating to what one might call the 'paranoia of power'. One may be most familiar to modern readers from Machiavelli's *Prince* (1513), where it is referred to as a long-standing controversy concerning 'whether it is better for a prince to be loved, or to be feared', but its sources are again Cicero and Seneca and, behind them, Xenophon's *Hiero*.²⁶ In *De infelicitate*, Niccolò's contribution to the debate is his assertion that princes cannot, in fact, ever enjoy friendship. They must always be fearful for usurpers, and hence can trust nobody. Furthermore, since friendship requires equality, and a prince, per definition, is superior to his subjects, no amicable bond can exist between them. Seeing they cannot be loved, princes have no other option but to be feared; and being feared will inevitably mean that they are hated.²⁷

The other obstacle to benevolent rule is seen by Niccolò as deriving from the first, and it pertains to the pernicious influence of courtiers. Since a prince can have no friends, he is instead surrounded by counselors, who flatter him to further their own ambitions. Unaccustomed to honest advice, he will grow ill-disposed toward the few good men who do present him with truths, and thus become hostile both to learning and to learned men, those harbingers of virtue and happiness.²⁸ In sum, therefore, princes must always be feared and hated, and they themselves will consistently hate virtue and learning. Both these problems are inherent in their office.

These arguments, insofar as they are convincing, have the merit of explaining the necessity of princely vice. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Niccolò's emphasis is not on these potential clinchers. Instead, the greater part of the dialogue concerns the contingent problems of power, namely, the moral degeneracy that tends to afflict

²⁵ See also in this chapter the discussion of Pontano's *De magnanimitate*.

²⁶ 'Nasce da questo una disputa: s'elli è meglio essere amato che temuto, o è converse', Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe*, ed. L. Firpo, Turin, 1961, ch. 17; cf. Cic. *Off.* 2.7.23–4; Sen. *Clem.* esp. 1.12.4; Xen. *Hier.* esp. 3. Xenophon's *Hiero* had been translated by Poggio's friend Leonardo Bruni (1401/3), on which see B. Maxson, 'Kings and Tyrants: Leonardo Bruni's translation of Xenophon's *Hiero*', *Renaissance Studies*, 24:2, 2010, pp. 188–206; and M. De Nichilo, 'Fortuna e tradizione della versione bruniana dello Ierone di Senofonte', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 25, 2013, pp. 327–40.

²⁷ Poggio, *De infelicitate*, ch. 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 58. The idea that the virtue of other men is suspect to a prince derives from Sallust, *Cat.* 7.2, and ultimately from Xenophon, *Hier.* 3; the extension of this specifically to learned men is a Florentine maneuver, which Poggio takes from Leonardo Bruni's 1428 funeral oration for Nanno Strozzi, *Leonardo Brunis Rede auf Nanni Strozzi: Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar*, ed. S. Daub, Stuttgart, 1996, ch. 22.

rulers. Again, the corruption of the court and its courtiers receives significant emphasis: greedy, wicked, and foolish, they stand between the prince and truth, hampering his learning and obscuring his vision with flattery and lies.²⁹ Other causes pertain to the prince himself and to his morals. His wealth, together with the license that stems from his power, allows the prince to exercise his passions without any restraint. This results in a whole range of vices, ranging from anger, suspicion, hostility, and aggression to lack of self-control, pride, arrogance, lust, hatred, cruelty, ambition, cupidity, poisoning, and, if this were insufficiently comprehensive, 'whatever else man's wickedness has invented for the ruin of mortals'.³⁰ Further discussion focuses on a more specific list of vices, all of which represent the victory of passion, or excessive desire, over reasoned restraint. Anger is treated first and at length, followed by ambition, extravagance, lust, pride, lack of self-control, greed, and desire.³¹

To understand why the prince will be prey to these desires and the vices that they generate, it is helpful to locate *De infelicitate principum* as an example of the revival of the Roman Stoa.³² At its most fundamental level, *De infelicitate* is a treatise about the opposition of *Virtus* and *Fortuna*.³³ Virtue, it claims, is the sole source of happiness, and its attainment is effected through a triumph of reason over the passions. Inasmuch as philosophy serves to confirm reason, and rein in the passions, it is essential that a virtuous man be learned.³⁴ This argument is made expressly against the opinion that happiness is a consequence of external or material goods such as wealth, status, and power, which Niccolò categorizes as products of Fortune.³⁵ These, of course, are precisely the boons of princes, whom he thus denies a preferential road to happiness. What is more, he maintains that virtue is harder to attain for a prince than for private individuals. Partly this is due to the fact that princes, so richly endowed with Fortune's gifts, are more likely to overvalue them. Additionally, vice is more alluring to them, since their wealth and power give them

²⁹ Poggio, *De infelicitate*, ch. 29.

³⁰ Namely ira, suspitiones, inimicitiae, bellum, impotentia, fastum, superbia, libidines, odia, crudelitas, ambitio dominandi, cupiditates, venefitia, 'et quicquid aliud ad perniciem mortalium nequitia hominum excogitavit', *ibid.*, ch. 31.

³¹ Namely ira, chs 53–4; ambitio, domini cupiditas, luxuria, libidines, superbia, impotentia, avaritia, cupiditates, *ibid.*, ch. 55. The emphasis on anger reflects the influence of Seneca's *De ira*.

³² This is indicated by Poggio's Roman sources, esp. Cicero's *De officiis* and Seneca's *De clementia* and *De ira*. It is indeed Poggio's Stoic framework in *De infelicitate* that sets the text apart from Greek models such as Xenophon's *Hiero*, see nn. 26 and 28 above.

³³ Poggio, *Infelicitate*, ch. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, esp. ch. 15.

license to indulge unrestrainedly. Thus, even rulers who started off with some flickering of virtue will end up being corrupted and evil:

And this follows not so much from human nature, as from the vice of the principate itself. For while we are by nature frail and weak, and easily fall into wantonness and vice, so the principate, in itself and through the license [it grants], is evil, and the worker and instrument of evils.³⁶

Niccolò's opponents pick up on the Stoic foundations of his position and accuse him of 'hunting the snark': the *vir sapiens*, the almost impossibly wise man who was the Stoa's ideal. Yet he repeatedly denies this, claiming that he would be content if a prince were merely as good as an average man with some semblance of virtue.³⁷ The irony is that this denial only strengthens his argument, for the trouble is precisely that such men, when elevated and pampered by Fortune, will lose whatever decency they had. The fact that princes cannot compare even to ordinary private persons thus becomes a further lesson in the corrupting effect of power, and another indictment against the institute of the principate.

There is, however, one countervailing force against the grip of power and vice. It is not Stoic philosophy, or even learning in general; rather, it is divine grace.³⁸ As Niccolò makes clear, it is bestowed freely, for no prince deserves it on account of his own merits. The few princes who live happily do so through God's bounty rather than any human endeavors or circumstances. Thus, even in his rare moments of optimism, Niccolò has no interest in individual distinctions.

De infelicitate principum, then, introduces humanism's virtue-based philosophy of tyranny and its Stoic framework. Through Marsuppini's argument, the dialogue also reflects the currency of the originally Aristotelian distinction between tyrants and kings, but it denies that this differentiation is valid. In response to Cosimo's question, the text similarly refuses to distinguish rulers according to the constitution of their states. Concern for the common good, love, and virtue are impossible for all who wield power, partly because of the conditions attending their position, partly due to the essence of the office itself. On both scores, courtiers shoulder a great deal of the blame for evil lordship. In sum, if tracts on tyranny are divided into

³⁶ 'Neque tantum hoc natura hominum, quantum ipsius evenit vitio principatus. Nam tum natura fragiles sumus atque imbecilles, qui facillime ad lasciviam et vitia labamur, tum principatus re ipsa et licentia malus est malorumque opifex ac minister', *ibid.*, ch. 28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, chs 37; 40; 71; 84. Naturally the 'animum enim quietum, liberum . . . et omni perturbatione vacuum', *ibid.*, ch. 84, is also the Epicurean ideal, which forms the second line of Niccolò's argument, see n. 11. Both schools also inform Poggio's later works, see n. 39.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, chs 82–3; 89.

'lumpers' and 'splitters', *De infelicitate* is decidedly a lumper, equating not only kings and tyrants but also republican leaders, and showing all to be prey to the caprice of Fortune and the feebleness of the human constitution.³⁹

This lumping perhaps represents the text's clearest flight from the priorities of scholasticism, which may be described as the method of ever-finer definitions. The argumentative manner of the work is equally antithetical. *De infelicitate* is not interested in proof, as is evident from its cavalier handling of the two lines of reasoning that semi-syllogistically show the necessity of princely evil. Instead, it aims at persuasion, which in Niccolò's hands consists in relentlessly battering down his opponents. Those, however, do not explicitly recant, and thus remain clear alternative voices that any audience must acknowledge. Similarly, Niccolò, prolix though he is, does not fully clarify his own positions and their implications. His disavowal of the *vir sapiens* in his Stoic argument is but one example of ambiguity and, perhaps, irony; his recourse to God's grace in an otherwise wholly irreligious treatise on the morality of tyranny is another. Thus, *De infelicitate* differs from its medieval predecessors not only in its tenets but also in their presentation: delivered in dialogue form by a complex protagonist, the arguments advanced in this debate are not—nor are they intended to be—exhaustive and definitive conclusions.⁴⁰

POGGIO'S CAESAR-SCIPIO CONTROVERSY

However, another text by Poggio shows that it was perfectly possible for him to split, instead. He did so when the genre of his writing—a paragon—demanded he distinguish between good and bad rulers: precisely what he refused to do in *De infelicitate principum*. Moreover, he did so by recourse to the Aristotelian topoi of good rule versus tyranny which he rejected in that dialogue. The text in question is the first installment of the so-called *Caesar-Scipio Controversy*, an epistolary treatise known as *De praestantia Caesaris et Scipionis* (*On the Pre-eminence of Caesar and Scipio*).⁴¹ In *De infelicitate*, as sketched above, both Caesar and Scipio Africanus were listed as unhappy republicans. In the *Caesar-Scipio Controversy*, by contrast, Africanus

³⁹ Not coincidentally, Poggio followed *De infelicitate* with dialogues *De varietate fortunae* (1447–8) and *De miseria humanae conditionis* (1455).

⁴⁰ On the dialogue as a humanist genre, see D. Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue: Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation*, Cambridge, MA/London, 1980; and D. Quint, 'Humanism and Modernity: A Reconsideration of Bruni's Dialogues', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38:3, 1985, pp. 423–45.

⁴¹ Poggio Bracciolini, *De praestantia Caesaris et Scipionis*, in *La Controverbia di Poggio Bracciolini e Guarino Veronese su Cesare e Scipione*, ed. D. Canfora, Florence, 2001. An English translation is forthcoming in *Poggio Bracciolini: On Princes and Tyrants*, eds and transls Schadee and Sidwell, with Rundle. An excellent discussion of this controversy is available in G. Pedullà, 'Scipione e i tiranni', in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, eds S. Luzzatto and G. Pedullà, vol. 1, ed. A. De Vincentiis, Turin, 2010, pp. 348–55.

appears as the ideal citizen of a republic, while Caesar is execrated as his inverse mirror image.⁴² Written in 1435 in Florence upon the request of Poggio's curial colleague—and Africanus' namesake—Scipione Mainenti, the *Praestantia* must in part be read as an exercise in Florentine republican discourse, employed in the interest of Cosimo's new regime and its papal visitor Eugenius IV. However, the contrast drawn by Poggio is not just between types of constitution. In the *Controversy*, Caesar is denounced not only as the founder of a monarchy but also as an illegitimate and lawless ruler, that is to say, a tyrant.

In the *Praestantia*, the topoi of bad rule are not spelled out, as they were in *De infelicitate*. Rather, they are embodied by the two protagonists, as is most easily seen by comparison of Caesar to his foil Scipio. Regarding Scipio, Poggio explicitly praises his 'integrity of life', that is to say, his virtuous demeanor.⁴³ Additionally, he recounts episodes from Africanus' career that serve to demonstrate another set of qualities: they show how he always made himself a servant of the state, subject to its laws, and selflessly seeking the common good.⁴⁴ These traits are, of course, identical with the characteristics of the good king advanced by Marsuppini. By contrast, Caesar is shown to have consistently subjugated the common good to his own interests. This thread runs through Poggio's description of Caesar's ascent through the *cursus honorum*, when his magistracies were attained through bribery and conspiracy, and carried out high-handedly. That culminated in the civil wars that pitted him against the Republic, judged by Poggio 'not worthy of praise, but of the highest execration by all men and peoples'.⁴⁵ Thus, instead of a parental figure, Caesar became a parricide, not only of the fatherland but also of the mother tongue: 'For he was the parricide of the fatherland as much as of the Latin language and the liberal arts'.⁴⁶

Poggio's evocation of the specter of tyranny is clearer still when he emphasizes Caesar's disregard for the law and the arbitrary execution of his offices. Over the course of the Gallic wars, Caesar achieved the extension of his command 'against the laws, against custom, and against the ancestral institutions', sometimes renewing the war of his own volition.⁴⁷ During the dictatorship that followed, 'he was above

⁴² This is true even in the structure of the text, which systematically juxtaposes the achievements of Scipio with the infamies of Caesar.

⁴³ Poggio, *Praestantia*, ll. 23–4, 'Scipio . . . belli laudem cum vitae integritate coniunxit'.

⁴⁴ Esp. *ibid.*, ll. 217–29; 239–47; 259–60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 47–67; 'bella civilia . . . non digna laude, sed summa omnium hominum ac gentium execratione', ll. 84–5.

⁴⁶ 'Non enim magis patriae quam Latinae linguae et bonarum artium extitit parricida', *ibid.*, ll. 328–9. Poggio's argument is that the civil wars destroyed Rome's literary talents, which could not re-emerge under the conditions of empire, cf. n. 28. This same argument had been made by Leonardo Bruni in his *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and transl. J. Hankins, vol. 1, Cambridge, MA, 2001, esp. 138.

⁴⁷ 'praeter leges, praeter consuetudines, praeter maiorum institutum', Poggio, *Praestantia*, ll. 70–76.

the laws, and governed the Republic according to his own judgment.’⁴⁸ Poggio’s assessment of Caesar’s conduct as consul renders the implications of this behavior explicit: ‘following the desires of his mind and his personal whim, he carried out the consulship in the manner of a tyrant.’⁴⁹ It should be noted that, as in *De infelicitate*, Caesar’s tyrannical rule takes place within the framework of the Republic: it is not, therefore, a constitutional difference between him and Africanus that is at stake.

This last quotation indicates that the lawlessness of rule is a defining characteristic of tyranny on a par—and indeed entwined—with the personal vices of the ruler. It is unsurprising, then, that the description of Caesar in the *Controversy* reads as a digest of the princely vices detailed in *De infelicitate*. More important than the similarity of these outrages is the fact that they share a cause: Caesar’s moral flaws are shown to be a consequence of his unbridled passions and desires. Furthermore, Poggio makes a point of the bad company Caesar kept: a crowd of louts and criminals who egged him on in his pursuits and who may be viewed as fulfilling the role that courtiers played in the dialogue.⁵⁰ Yet if *De infelicitate* contrasts *Virtus* and *Fortuna*, the *Praestantia*’s opposition instead appears to be between virtue and vice. There is no suggestion that human nature cannot withstand the contingencies of power—in fact, the figure of Scipio proves this to be untrue. Rather, it is Caesar’s personal failings, specifically his lack of self-restraint, that turn him into an evil ruler. In the *Praestantia* this moral flaw is also at the root of Caesar’s problems with the law:

For his nature, intent on supreme power, stained his life with many outrages; and his ambition and lust for domination did not allow him to act according to the laws and for the sake of the common good.⁵¹

Disregard for the law is a consequence of Caesar’s excessive desires: it is a refusal to allow his passions to be curbed by external constraints. In Poggio’s portrait of Caesar, his high-handed approach to Roman law is emblematic of his intemperance. So, while the lawlessness of Caesar’s actions is an issue in designating him a tyrant, in Poggio’s treatise this legal issue becomes part and parcel of his moral defects.

A comparison of the *Controversy* with *De infelicitate principum* demonstrates several connections and divergences between the texts. Both works agree that tyranny is not restricted to autocratic forms of government: it is quite possible within a

⁴⁸ ‘solutus legibus pro arbitrio suo rem publicam administraret’, *ibid.*, ll. 102–3.

⁴⁹ ‘Consul . . . factus, pro libidine animi proque solius nutu in morem tyranni gessit consulatum’, *ibid.*, ll. 62–4.

Poggio again applies the term to Caesar in l. 123, ‘tyrannidem’.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 112–14.

⁵¹ ‘Nam prona ad principatum natura vitam multis flagitiis inquinavit; ambitio et dominandi cupido nihil ex legibus, utilitate publica agere permisit’, *ibid.*, ll. 110–12.

republic, as is clear from Caesar's tyrannical consulate. Both also agree about which vices—and which underlying moral failings—occasion tyranny. But the *Controversy*, unlike *De infelicitate*, also adduces external criteria of tyranny, most clearly and insistently Caesar's transgressions against Roman law. In fact, Marsuppini's hallmarks of good rule, which are scorned by Niccolò in *De infelicitate*, are embodied by the *Controversy*'s Scipio, while the figure of Caesar becomes emblematic for their absence. Yet if the illegality of Caesar's rule is an indicator of his tyranny, it is not an issue that can be separated entirely from his interior condition. In Poggio's treatment, Caesar's disregard for the law is itself a symptom of his moral corruption.

PONTANO'S *DE PRINCIPE*

Giovanni Pontano's 1468 *De principe* (*On the Prince*) is another treatise that closely follows the topics of Poggio's *De infelicitate*. Yet like Poggio's *Praestantia*, the text is a 'splitter', in that it seeks to separate the good prince from the bad. This is motivated by the work's genre—a mirror for princes—and its context of production: Pontano composed the treatise specifically for the instruction of the twenty-year-old Alfonso, Duke of Calabria and future king of Naples.⁵² Thus, if it revisits the materials of *De infelicitate*, it does so with an opposite end, to wit the portrayal of a ruler who is good.

De principe opens as follows: 'Publius Cornelius Scipio, Duke Alfonso, who was later called Africanus because of his prowess'.⁵³ In other words, the treatise's ideal prince, whom young Alfonso should take for his example, is the republican hero Scipio Africanus, about whom Pontano's opinion is identical to Poggio's in the *Controversy*. Again, as in *De infelicitate*, constitutional differences have no bearing on the assessment of good or bad rule. To distinguish the two, Pontano—like Marsuppini, and Poggio in the *Praestantia*—instead enlists some of the traditional hallmarks. Most explicit is his assertion that the king must base his judgments on the law, which is equal for all: 'assume the person of the laws themselves, which are always the same to everybody'.⁵⁴ Interestingly, he later mitigates this statement by claiming that law is not always identical with justice, exhorting the good prince to err on the side of mildness.⁵⁵ Pontano also intimates that a good ruler should love his

⁵² Giovanni Pontano, *De principe*, ed. G. Cappelli, Rome, 2003, ch. 14. An English translation by N. Webb is available in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, ed. J. Kraye, vol. 2, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 69–87. For a discussion of Pontano's relationship to Poggio's *Controversy* with different conclusions, see D. Canfora, 'Pontano su Cesare e Scipione', in *Confini dell'umanesimo letterario: Studi in onore di Francesco Tateo*, eds M. De Nichilo, G. Distaso, and A. Iurilli, Rome, 2003, pp. 187–99.

⁵³ Pontano, *De principe*, ch. 1, 'Publius Cornelius Scipio, dux Alfonse, cui post ex virtute Africano fuit cognomen'.

⁵⁴ 'ipsarum legum personam induas, quae eadem semper sunt omnibus', *ibid.*, ch. 48.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 57; cf. n. 66.

subjects.⁵⁶ About the pursuit of the common good *De principe* says nothing, though this could be argued to be implicit in its portrait of the ideal ruler.

Far greater, in any case, is the weight placed on princely virtues and vices. Pontano agrees with Niccolò on the vices that frequently plague rulers and cautions against them (the treatise even includes two chapters constituting a miniature *De infelicitate principum*), and similarly locates their origin in insufficient self-control.⁵⁷ 'Anger does not permit distinguishing what is right, hatred impels toward inequities, love clouds judgment, lust spurs to inflicting violence, hurt encourages vengeance, envy causes ruin.'⁵⁸

This tirade provokes the categorical conclusion that 'he who is in charge of others must be totally free from passions'.⁵⁹ Likewise, the ruler must avoid the corruptions of the court: he should not listen to flatterers, who are inimical to good judgment; he must be on guard against ambitious courtiers; he must resist the wicked, the intemperate, and liars; and flee those men (and women?) who draw him toward pleasures.⁶⁰

It has been argued that the good monarch is often conceived as the inverse of a bad one.⁶¹ Pontano's *Prince* conforms to that model when it introduces the concept of *maiestas*.⁶² This majesty mirrors the relationship between monarchy and tyranny, in that it covers those qualities that render a monarch good; structurally, it comprises the inverse of the vices that define the tyrant. As a result, Pontano's majesty is in part a negative quality: it is a matter of self-control. As noted above, a good prince must 'restrain his anger, as contrary to majesty'.⁶³ However, his majesty also covers new ground, for it includes a positive component: something to strive for rather than avoid. In addition to practicing restraint, the good lord must make sure to be held in 'admiration, without which there can be no majesty'.⁶⁴ This latter side of majesty comprises whatever gains the prince the esteem, and ultimately the love, of his people.⁶⁵ The primary quality needed to secure affection is *humanitas*, of which the prince ought to be an exemplar, on the grounds that 'inhumanity is the mother of

⁵⁶ Ibid., ch. 35.

⁵⁷ Ibid., chs 41–2.

⁵⁸ 'Ira nanque rectum quod sit cernere minime patitur, odium ad iniqua impellit, amor iudicium impedit, trahit ad vim inferendam libido, stimulat ad vindictam dolor, invidia praecipitem agit', ibid., ch. 14.

⁵⁹ 'Qui aliis praeest omnino vacuus esse debet affectibus', ibid., ch. 14.

⁶⁰ Ibid., chs 7; 8; 12; 13, respectively.

⁶¹ See the chapters by Jennie Grillo and Nino Luraghi in this volume.

⁶² *Maiestas* is not a new term, as Pontano acknowledges, but he is the first humanist author to make it a crucial, perhaps the crucial, element of his theory of kingship, Pontano, *De principe*, ch. 46.

⁶³ '... iracundiam prohibere tanquam maiestatis inimicam', ibid., ch. 47.

⁶⁴ 'nascetur admiratio quaedam, sine qua maiestas esse nullo modo potest', ibid., ch. 47.

⁶⁵ Ibid., ch. 46.

hatred, like pride is the mother of cruelty, and both are bad guardians of the prince's life as well as his state.⁶⁶ Winning characteristics such as clemency and liberality, but also decorous dress and regal demeanor, all come under this umbrella.⁶⁷

De principe thus introduces a third category of criteria distinguishing the good prince from the bad. Besides, first, the hallmarks that are supposedly externally verifiable, and second, the internal, psychological vices, the treatise advances a cluster of features that are external yet subjective, in that they relate to the public perception of the prince. This vision of majesty provides Pontano with a framework to revisit—though he does not refute—the two arguments that *De infelicitate* presented as structural problems within the institute of the principate. Regarding the vexed question of whether a prince should prefer to be loved or feared, Pontano comes down firmly on the side of love: he claims it is essential for a good prince to be loved ‘not only by his friends, but by all his subjects.’⁶⁸ With respect to the second question, whether princes fear the virtue of others, Pontano admits that this happens all too frequently—however, the good ruler will always pursue virtue, which will render him more loved, and thus make his rule more secure against revolts and usurpers.⁶⁹

Pontano was well aware of the novelty of his idea of majesty, to which he returned in later works, and which inspired other Neapolitan authors.⁷⁰ Two things stand out about his contribution besides its innovation. The first is its pragmatic nature. Pontano clearly assumes that the love of the people will be the natural consequence of their ruler's virtues. But equally clearly, there are practical reasons for a prince to invest in his moral qualities, namely, the maintenance of his state. Indeed, there are passages in *De principe* where the object of the exercise appears to be love, and its concomitant perks, rather than virtue per se.⁷¹ Secondly, Pontano warns against pursuing appearances instead of real virtue. However, numerous examples in *De principe* almost casually underline the importance of image for the prince, and his need to be seen to be good, pious, and so forth.⁷² There is no attempt to distinguish between truth and reputation, or point to potential conflicts between them.

⁶⁶ ‘Inhumanitas enim mater est odii ut superbia crudelitatis, malus utraque et vitae et principatus custos,’ *ibid.*, ch. 39.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, esp. chs 55, 57; 53; 51; 69, 73–4.

⁶⁸ ‘Multum enim conferet humanitas, qua virtute cum exceleas, necesse est non modo ut ab intimis tuis amere multum, sed a coeteris omnibus,’ *ibid.*, ch. 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 42.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, chs 75–6; cf. Giovanni Pontano, *I libri delle virtù sociali*, ed. F. Tateo, Rome, 1999. See also e.g. Iuniano Maio's treatise from 1492, *De maiestate, inedito del sec. XV*, ed. F. Gaeta, Bologna, 1956.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, e.g. chs 51; 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, ch. 39; cf. chs 3; 5; 57; 59; 62; 67.

Rather—as was the case in *De infelicitate*—the argument is presented as a persuasive exposition, leaving it to the reader to draw out the consequences that the author leaves unmentioned.

One of these is that, in this manner, Pontano imputes new meaning to the old adage that the good king, unlike the tyrant, is loved by the people he rules. If this love no longer follows from virtue alone, but also from successful self-presentation, it stops being another marker of the prince's interior morality: instead, it becomes a reflection of his skill in courting his subjects. This emphasis on what one might call the reception of the prince by his people has potentially far-reaching implications. If majesty distinguishes the prince from the tyrant, and if majesty itself is, in part, a matter of being favorably received, then it follows that subjects, and their opinions on their ruler, play a part in legitimizing his reign. That is to say, it opens up the possibility that a tyrant or bad king is not necessarily a vicious or incompetent ruler, but rather a leader who is not validated by his people.

PONTANO'S *DE MAGNANIMITATE*

Neither a lumper nor a splitter, Pontano's 1499 *De magnanimitate* (*On Magnanimity*) is more of a 'shader': it does not seek to separate black from white but paints in shades of gray. This is because the treatise, addressed to Pontano's noble student Andrea Matteo Acquaviva, examines the characteristics of one virtue, magnanimity, in varying circumstances.⁷³ This relativism bespeaks the tract's Aristotelian leanings, which are expressed also in Pontano's definition of virtue as a point along a spectrum between two extremes: thus he defines magnanimity as a middle ground between arrogance and pusillanimity. Aristotle is, in fact, the text's first and most frequently cited authority. As such, *De magnanimitate* is a rather different enterprise from the predominantly Stoic works examined so far. Nonetheless, the text is worth considering in this context for what it has to say on the topoi of tyranny, and on constitutional differences, and also because it shows Pontano no less capable of selfcontradiction than his Florentine predecessor.

Tyranny falls within the remits of Pontano's discussion because it is the opposite of the treatise's titular virtue. Since magnanimity clearly is a moral quality, its reverse, tyranny, must also be a moral affliction. However, as Pontano conjoins magnanimity to the defense of liberty, tyranny becomes not only a personal vice but also a perversion of good rule: a form of servitude sustained by force and fear.

⁷³ Giovanni Pontano, *De magnanimitate*, ed. F. Tateo, Florence, 1969.

And indeed a man of lofty character, who for that reason is called ‘magnanimous’, surely is the keenest defender of liberty, since he deems it wholly shameful to serve others or, which is the same thing, thoroughly dishonorable to force others to serve through force or fear—seeing that Hercules, a magnanimous man, tamed the monsters, namely tyrants and unbridled men, and wanted states and peoples to be free.⁷⁴

Yet this dichotomy does not exhaust the meaning of magnanimity and tyranny: more factors come into play in defining virtue and vice. This becomes clear through examination of Pontano’s exemplars.

As before, Pontano’s perfect model of magnanimity is Scipio Africanus, who receives an encomium for his constant endeavor to benefit others, both publicly and privately.⁷⁵ Yet in terms of his achievements, Scipio comes second to both Caesar and Alexander the Great. The latter two differ as follows. Alexander, being born the son of a king, could cultivate his greatness from childhood, without any restraints of means or propriety.⁷⁶ Caesar, on the other hand,

because he was born in a free country, could not excel in the same things as Alexander, certainly not as a young man; and at last, as he was lawless and excessive, he wickedly assaulted his country and its freedom, which was in common between him and the whole citizenry.⁷⁷

Thus, Scipio, placing himself in the service of others, respected the boundaries of propriety. Alexander was the greater man, since he could exercise his desires within the constraints of the constitution. Caesar was equally desirous of greatness, but his position was constitutionally defined: not accepting those limitations to his pursuits, his excessive ambition had a pernicious effect on Rome.⁷⁸ For this reason Pontano’s cautionary tales about the threat posed by ambition all concern republican statesmen, such as the Gracchi, Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Crassus.⁷⁹ In flagrant

⁷⁴ ‘Etenim magni animi vir, qui ex hoc dictus est magnanimus, vel acerrimus libertatis defensor est, qui cum turpissimum esse ducat servire aliis vel inhonestissimum quidem iudicaverit per violentiam ac metum alios ad serviendum compellere, quando Hercules ut magnanimus monstra, hoc est tyrannos, atque impotentes homines domuit liberasque civitates ac nationes esse voluit’, *ibid.*, I.19.9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I.19.4–5; Pontano’s depiction of Scipio recalls Poggio’s in the *Controversy*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I.45.4, 8–9.

⁷⁷ ‘Nam Caesar in libera natus cum esset patria, nec ea praestare potuit, quae Alexander, nec etiam adolescens demumque ut iniustus et nimius in patriam ac libertatem, quae ipsi cum civibus universis erat communis, impie crassatus est’, *ibid.*, I.45.5.

⁷⁸ See also *ibid.*, I.18.6; II.5.25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, I.47.15–17; II.5.25; also ‘Quid enim vasto animo et a ratione ac legibus aberrante perniciosius?’, I.17.10. cf. Cic. 1.8.26.

contrast with his assertions about the rule of law in *De principe*, Pontano clarifies the differences in their respective circumstances as follows:

Alexander . . . was his own law, and he prescribed the law to others. But for Caesar . . . and other Romans, the fatherland itself was the law, to which all matters had to conform.⁸⁰

Pontano frequently juxtaposes Caesar and Alexander, most often as two outstanding generals and all-around illustrious exemplars, but sometimes as a contrast through whom to study situational ethics.⁸¹ A case in point is his evaluation of the magnanimity of both Alexander and Caesar toward opponents. Pontano showers nothing but praise on Alexander for bestowing his liberality on his detractors. In the same chapter, he commends Caesar's forgetfulness of injuries, and his clemency toward his enemies in the civil war, but archly notes that these sentiments did not induce him to spare the fatherland.⁸² Arguably, the performed virtue is the same, or Caesar's is greater, inasmuch as pardoning one's military enemies surpasses forgiving a slanderer. The difference lies in the circumstances in which their virtue was practiced: Caesar owed the fatherland, Alexander owed nobody.

If Pontano's assessment of Scipio and Caesar is identical to Poggio's in the *Controversy*, his treatment of Caesar and Alexander shows a concern for the specificities of constitutions, and a benevolence toward monarchy, diametrically opposed to both Poggio's texts. This is not surprising: Stoic virtue—Poggio's yardstick—is absolute, whereas *De magnanimitate*'s Aristotelian framework is self-consciously relative. In the latter text, therefore, the constitution is a starting point for determining the moral worth of an action: what is commendable in one state may be unacceptable in another. In this respect Pontano reverses the priorities of the *Praestantia*, where personal morality was treated as a potential cause of lawlessness. Granting greater license to monarchs, Pontano also contradicts his own *De principe*, in which the king is bound by the law, and self-restraint is at the root of his virtues.

CONCLUSION

A few remarks may be made about the common features of these four texts in the light of the longer tradition of discourse on tyranny. First, as expected, all four works

⁸⁰ 'Alexander . . . ipse lex sibi erat et aliis praescribat. At Caesari . . . Romanisque aliis patria ipsa lex erat, ad quam referenda erant omnia', *ibid.*, I.47.23–5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, I.27; 42; 46; 47; 48; in addition to nn. 50 and 52.

⁸² *Ibid.*, I.29.12; 29.3–4.

treat good and bad government as a predominantly moral issue; however, all also show themselves to be conversant with the time-honored impersonal criteria for tyrannical rule. Second, kings and tyrants are not separated as they were in the medieval tradition; what is more, republican leaders are included among the *principes* and shown to have the same potential—if not greater—for tyrannical behavior as their autocratic counterparts. Third, with the exception of *De magnanimitate*, which does not consider the matter, the texts share an anxiety about evil counselors and their nefarious influence on the powerful. This, too, is likely to be a medieval inheritance (the theme is not prominent among the classical sources, although Pseudo-Plutarch addresses it) and one that is all the more remarkable since an important contributing cause—the definitional impossibility of an evil king—has disappeared.⁸³ Fourth, this chapter has ignored God's role in designating evil lords. In doing so, it faithfully follows the four texts, which show not the slightest interest in the issue beyond Niccolò's assertion that princes can only be happy by the undeserved grant of God's grace. Likewise, the use of biblical examples and quotations is extremely limited. Religion is a somewhat different matter: Pontano's *De principe* lists *religio*—whether pagan or Christian—among the virtues of the good prince, by which his subjects may be won over.⁸⁴ It is not, however, among his priorities. This neglect is a clear and decisive break from medieval predecessors and perhaps signifies a return to the Roman view of religion as an essentially civic ritual. It is a shared feature of Quattrocento discourse on lordship that should be borne in mind when assessing Machiavelli's famously 'atheist' *Prince*. Fifth, and finally, literary form constitutes a significant aspect of humanism's reorientation of political discourse. The genres of the texts discussed in this chapter have implications for their contents: the dialogue, the paragon, the mirror, and the treatise are appropriate vehicles for different types of argument, and so a paragon, for instance, will polarize in a way a dialogue need not. Equally important is their epideictic nature: aiming at exposition and persuasion rather than definition and proof, these works—again with the partial exception of the Aristotelian treatise *De magnanimitate*—make an appeal to their audience to reflect on the merits of their case. As the self-contradictions of both Poggio and Pontano suggest, they make no claim to universal validity. In that sense, it is a disservice to humanist authors to try and extract their theory of tyranny from the context of these debates.

⁸³ Ps.-Plutarch to Trajan, adduced in John of Salisbury (Pseudo-Plutarch may in fact be John of Salisbury himself), *Policraticus*, V.9; and see also the chapter by Cary J. Nederman in this volume.

⁸⁴ 'Quantum autem ad popularem comparandam benevolentiam religionis valeat opinio docuit Macedo Alexander', Pontano, *De principe*, ch. 5, cf. 'tum oportet ut . . . prae te feras . . . religionem', ch. 55.

11

Machiavelli's *Prince* and the Concept of Tyranny

Gabriele Pedullà*



AMONG THE MOST innovative aspects of Machiavelli's treatise *The Prince* compared with fifteenth-century mirrors for princes are certain absences. It is always somewhat dangerous to interpret silences and voids, but in this case Machiavelli's consistent and systematic choice leaves little doubt as to his intentions. Among the elements banned from Machiavelli's text are all those dedicated to a humanistic education, from a guide to proper manners at the table, in dress, and in conversation (the 'minor ethic' later called 'etiquette'), to the articulated *cursus studiorum* that authors such as Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Francesco Filelfo, Bartolomeo Platina, Francesco Patrizi, and Filippo Beroaldo the Elder taught their pupils, destined one day to shoulder the responsibilities of government. Anyone even vaguely familiar with these works would immediately have recognized Machiavelli's desire to break with this tradition once and for all. Machiavelli is not interested in molding a humanistic prince, and he wants this to be clear to his readers from the beginning. As he writes in Chapter XIV:

A prince, therefore, must not have any other object nor any other thought, nor must he adopt anything as his art but war, its institutions, and its discipline; because that is the only art befitting one who commands. . . . On the other hand,

* This chapter was translated from Italian by Stephen Marth and revised by the author.

it is evident that when princes have given more thought to delicate refinements than to military concerns, they have lost their state.¹

This choice has an impact on the entire structure of his treatise, beginning with its length. The conciseness of *The Prince* in comparison to the majority of fifteenth-century treatises of the same title is in part a result of Machiavelli's decision to do away with the elaborate pedagogical dictates of the humanists.

Machiavelli's first readers, however, would have noted yet another absence, one that would perhaps have been even more disconcerting to them: the absence of the figure of the tyrant. Whereas in the history of political theory—from classical to medieval and humanistic theory—the tyrant occupied a central place as a negative image of the good ruler, Machiavelli's treatise does not employ the term at all. A lacuna of this sort would not have gone unnoticed. Prince and tyrant—type and antitype—were present as an inseparable pair in every work on the theme available to Machiavelli's contemporaries, including those by Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Isocrates, Cicero, Seneca, Dio Chrysostom, and Pliny as well as more recent authors. The juxtaposition of the two figures, prince and tyrant, was crucial for defining the characteristics of the prince, almost as if the true nature of the former could only emerge through comparison with the latter.² Rather than political, or indeed before being political, the divide was of a moral nature. Not only was the tyrant devoid of the virtues required of a good ruler, and afflicted with all the opposite vices, but he represented a precise human character: the image of the extreme state of degradation at which an individual might arrive who was incapable of controlling his animal impulses and submitting his senses to reason. In his worst incarnation, the tyrant represented a sick person, to be pitied more than hated.

In the *de principe* genre, instructions and prohibitions are often listed side by side, as are vices (to be avoided) and virtues (to be cultivated), according to a presentation that Machiavelli himself reproduces in Chapter XV. Nevertheless, this contrast could be summarized for the most part in one principal distinction: while a tyrant looks after his own self-interest, a prince truly deserving of this title dedicates himself entirely to the well-being of the whole community. This clear distinction, on which everyone agreed, was more difficult to maintain when judging concrete political actions. The question was particularly complicated in Italy, where since the end of the thirteenth century, but at an accelerated rate in the following century, a large number of municipalities in the center-north of the peninsula had fallen prey

¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, transl. P. Bondanella, Oxford/New York, 2005, p. 50.

² See especially the chapters by Nino Luraghi and Jennie Grillo in this volume.

to the power of one family or another. Benefiting from the fighting between several factions, the most unscrupulous clans were able to take control of the municipal government and, little by little, through force and cunning, lay the foundations for dynastic lordships. From the perspective of their adversaries, they were clearly tyrants, but the rulers rejected this accusation, preferring to present themselves as peacemakers and 'protectors' of communal liberties.

Of course, the dispute was not just a matter of names. Authors from antiquity, beginning with Cicero (*De officiis*, III.4.19, and *Philippicae*, II.44.114 and II.46.117), invited citizens to openly rebel against those who usurped public power; in the language of scholastic and legal philosophy, they were urged to exercise the 'right of resistance', physically eliminating the tyrant if necessary. The only divergence that emerged on this point was whether the citizens were required first to appeal to higher authorities who might then punish the guilty ruler, or whether they could take up arms themselves. Yet, although there was absolute consensus about the principle that tyrants incarnated corrupt and evil politics, the difficulty lay in recognizing them. Was there an indisputable system for identifying a tyrant? The question was further complicated by the frequency—still at the beginning of the sixteenth century—with which the term was employed to delegitimize political opponents, whether they be feudatories who had usurped the prerogatives of central power, or lords unwilling to recognize certain privileges traditionally afforded the community. 'Tyrant' could also be applied to a citizen who had obtained too much power (even without attacking the republican forms of self-government of his city) or to a prince who levied a particularly burdensome tax on his subjects. Therefore, in the language of the period, the term could refer to vastly different figures and behaviors.³

Such 'abuses' only made attempts to verify the existence of truly despotic authorities that much more difficult. In response to this question, Machiavelli's contemporaries continued to repeat the solution proposed a century and a half earlier by one of the greatest medieval jurists, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, in his brief treatise *De tyranno*.⁴ With the approach of a man of the law who turns to philosophy to develop those indispensable conceptual instruments necessary for interpreting the actual examples in question, Bartolus formulated two concrete and effective principles to distinguish legitimate lords from those who instead warranted the title tyrant.

³ See the chapters by Cary J. Nederman and Hester Schadee in this volume. Note also the parallel use of *rex* in republican Rome discussed by Yelena Baraz.

⁴ D. Quagliani, *Politica e diritto nel Trecento italiano. Il 'De tyranno' di Bartolo di Sassoferrato (1314–1357)*, Florence, 1983.

Bartolus had read in Thomas Aquinas that there were two instances in which authority (*praelatio*) can be defined as ‘not coming from God’: ‘first, as to the mode in which authority is acquired, and, second, as to the use which is made of authority’ (*Commentarium in sententias Petri Lombardi*, II.44.2.2). Starting from this dyad, he constructed his system for identifying and condemning a tyrant. The case of unworthiness to rule stemming from its acquisition was clearly the more straightforward of the two. Whoever holds a position of governance, Bartolus explained, must be able to provide formal recognition of his condition of preeminence by a superior power (the *praelatio* of which Thomas Aquinas had spoken); otherwise he is a ‘tyrant for lack of title’ (*tyrannus ex defectu tituli*). In Italy, with the exception of the free independent municipalities, this left only two possibilities. A lord could exercise power thanks to the authorization of the emperor in those parts of the peninsula that belonged to the so-called *Regnum Italiae* (the entire center-north, Tuscany included, with the sole exception of Venice). Alternatively, he could obtain a papal license within the Papal States (in the South, in the kingdom of Naples, formally a territory subordinate to the pope but in practice independent, the problem of territorial fragmentation into small autonomous enclaves was not as pressing). For Bartolus, in the absence of a legal *titulus*, anyone who imposed himself as the ruling lord of a free city or who had, through force, usurped power to which he was not entitled, was to be unquestionably considered a tyrant and punished for his illicit appropriation.

More complex to identify were what Bartolus referred to as *tyranni ex parte exercitii*, that is, the tyrants whose tyranny resided in their actions. Abstractly speaking, their evident lack of concern for the common good (*bonum commune*) would have sufficed to unmask them. Bartolus, however, being the adept jurist that he was, knew that the effectiveness of his categories was proportional to their precision and as such labored to offer the reader as detailed a record of cases as possible. As Jérémie Barthas has recently demonstrated, the importance of Bartolus in the history of political thought lies in the invention of a special semiotics of power meant to separate good from bad rulers.⁵ It is with this aim that *De tyranno* looks for support to Aristotle (*Politics*, V.11) and Giles of Rome (*De regimine principum*, III.2.10), both of whom had cataloged the instruments (*cautelae*) that tyrants commonly employ to reinforce their control over a city. Following their example, Bartolus identified ten actions that were despotic enough in nature to reveal and inculcate a tyrant: killing the most eminent citizens; eliminating scholars (here Bartolus was thinking primarily about

⁵ J. Barthas, ‘Formes de gouvernement ou modalités de la preuve? Éclaircissements sur le *Traité du tyran* de Bartole de Sassoferrato’, in *Della tirannia. Machiavelli con Bartolo*, ed. idem, Florence, 2007, pp. 47–73.

jurists); discouraging or oppressing scholarship; prohibiting legitimate associations; filling the city with spies; dividing the citizens; impoverishing the people; engaging the city in useless wars to distract the citizens from other concerns; enrolling foreign mercenary soldiers to guarantee the safety of the ruler himself; adhering to a faction and persecuting the opposing faction. Even when in possession of a legitimate title, recourse to any of these strategies without just cause (*iusta causa*) was evidence enough that the government in power was corrupt, instantly allowing the subjects to appeal to the superior authority who had conferred the title on the tyrant in order to have him deposed.

Bartolus' theory immediately enjoyed great success and would continue to influence all reflection on good and bad government in Europe, through to at least the eighteenth century. At times, some legitimate doubts remained about the status of tyrants *ex parte exercitii* due to the exceptions provided by just cause (e.g., the homicide of Remus by Romulus), which made unmasking them more difficult. For example, how could one show that a war had been initiated merely to distract the citizens from internal political events? Or demonstrate a ruler's intent to keep a city divided? Until otherwise proven, a ruler could claim that all attempts to bring about peace among factions had simply failed. Though he did admit that some cases were inevitably unresolvable, Bartolus ultimately believed that the wicked conscience of a guilty tyrant could not escape the notice of a capable jurist, who would always find a way to expose it. Generally speaking, Bartolus' concept was the most remarkable system for incriminating tyrants to be devised by a man of the law, and as such remained a mandatory point of reference for Machiavelli's contemporaries in their attempt to limit the power of princes—big and small, lay and ecclesiastical—and oblige them to give greater attention to the needs of their subjects.

The bewilderment of Machiavelli's first readers at not finding any allusion to the tyrant in *The Prince* should be explained within this context, in which this word did not merely refer generically to a selfish or violent ruler but rather carried a technical value (as was true for the humanist mirrors for princes as well).⁶ Machiavelli not only avoids using the term 'tyrant' to describe some of the most famous Greek despots commonly identified as such in ancient sources but even seems to want to conceal the illegality of all those lords who were not formally recognized by an authority

⁶ See G. Cappelli, 'La otra cara del poder. Virtud y legitimidad en el humanismo político', in *Tiranía: Aproximaciones a una figura del poder*, eds idem and A. Gómez Ramos, Madrid, 2008, pp. 97–120; and G. Pedullà, 'Scipione e i tiranni', in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, eds S. Luzzatto and G. Pedullà, vol. 1, ed. A. De Vincentiis), Turin, 2010, pp. 348–55.

with the blatant euphemism ‘new prince’ (*principe nuovo*).⁷ In Machiavelli, this expression sounds like a direct provocation. After all, what were the majority of ‘new princes’ discussed in his treatise if not obvious tyrants *ex defectu tituli*, in other words, those who had always been the easiest to condemn using Bartolus’ system? By never uttering the term—the single word capable of inciting censure, and hopefully punishment—Machiavelli appears to have wanted to help despots suppress the evidence of their illegitimate usurpation of power.

Machiavelli’s acceptance of behaviors traditionally associated with corrupt rulers—parsimony bordering on avarice (*The Prince*, XVI), the refusal to exercise clemency (XVII), the employment of deception (XVIII)—must have been met with more disapproval still. But it gets worse. While Machiavelli only endorses one of the *cautelae tyrannicae* listed by Bartolus, namely, the suppression of eminent figures who threaten the ‘new prince’, his advice to princes to inspire fear rather than love in his subjects could easily have caused readers to envision uncontrolled outbursts of emergency measures against all opponents (XVII). The absence of the term *tyrannus* for figures like Hiero, Agathocles, and Nabis, together with Machiavelli’s euphemistic use of an expression like ‘new prince’, made it plausible to interpret such positions as part of a larger attempt to shield even the worst rulers from the legal instruments of the jurists.

The absence of the term tyrant, then, is particularly important when one considers that for almost three centuries the reception of Machiavelli’s work hinged on this point. His obstinate refusal to use the word throughout the entire work must have been shocking, particularly in relation to princes who were explicitly condemned as tyrants, such as Agathocles and Oliverotto. It would have required so little of Machiavelli—just one word—considering that Aristototele’s use of the term in the *Politics* offered readers such a clear indication of his judgment. The fact that Machiavelli prefers the generic term ‘prince’ to describe both good and bad rulers transmitted instead the idea that, all things considered, he suggested to good rulers that it was possible to adopt the techniques of the bloodiest despots without losing their status of ‘prince’.

It would not be an exaggeration to define some of the first hostile reactions to *The Prince* as ‘hysterical’. Teacher of tyrants, the devil incarnate, enemy of mankind: his detractors spared Machiavelli no epithet. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to reduce this anti-Machiavellianism to a kind of caricature reaction as is commonly

⁷ It must be noted that ‘new prince’ was a symptomatic euphemism but not a neologism: in Latin the expression *novus princeps* was used by Roman historians to define new emperors, and above all Vespasian, who gained power without having any blood ties to the Julio-Claudian dynasty. It also appears in the Vulgate and occasionally in the records of the Florentine Republic.

done by modern scholars. The tone of the attacks aimed at *The Prince*, often direct and explicit, should not fool us into underestimating the intellectual seriousness of Machiavelli's detractors. So, instead of dismissing objections to *The Prince*, it is important to remember that, in addition to the insults of the pedants and the devout, there were many fair criticisms of Machiavelli: philosophically argued objections that were anything but laughable—arguments that deserve to be considered seriously if we truly want to understand the significance of the debate.

This is particularly true in relation to the question of tyranny and the absence of the term 'tyrant' in *The Prince*. Indeed, the majority of philosophical attacks on Machiavelli have centered on this point. The origin of these readings can be traced back to a treatise by a famous Aristotelian thinker, Agostino Nifo, whose *De regnandi peritia* (*On the Expertise of Ruling*, published in 1523, even before the first printed edition of Machiavelli's book) was a scholarly rebuttal of *The Prince*. Nifo's work has also been the object of one of the greatest misunderstandings in the history of scholarship on Machiavelli. Despite the fact that Nifo overturns almost all of Machiavelli's conclusions, *De regnandi peritia* is generally (and erroneously) considered a plagiarism of the very work it aims to rebut, owing to Nifo's loyalty to the structure of *The Prince* and the great number of long citations of Machiavelli. I will not here go into a lengthy explanation of how this misunderstanding came about.⁸ Rather, I would like to stress that, of the many criticisms he levels at Machiavelli, Nifo concentrates above all on the disappearance of the photographic negative of the good ruler. This image he immediately revives by providing a list of the actions that traditional political theory had assigned to the type and antitype: virtuous behavior in the case of princes, and morally reprehensible behavior in the case of tyrants. It is a small amendment, but one capable of instantly rectifying the scandal caused by Machiavelli.⁹

Although *De regnandi peritia* does not seem to have widely circulated or to have been very influential, it is important as the first critique to express an attitude that would become extremely common among Machiavelli's adversaries (independently of Nifo, but based on a shared patrimony of philosophical and legal sources), easily overcoming the religious chasm dividing Europe into Catholics and Lutherans. A small anthology of some authoritative commentaries will show how the accusation raised against *The Prince* is always the same.

⁸ On Nifo as founder of anti-Machiavellianism rather than as a plagiarist, see G. Pedullà, 'Disputare con il Principe', in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, vol. 1, pp. 796–803; and idem, 'Aristoteles contra Machiavelli: Agostino Nifos Traktat *De regnandi peritia* und die Erstrezeption des *Principe* im Königreich Neapel', in *Texturen der Macht. 500 Jahre 'Il Principe'*, eds J. Frömmer and A. Oster, Berlin, 2014, pp. 155–94.

⁹ G. Procacci, *Machiavelli nella cultura europea dell'età moderna*, Rome/Bari, 1995, pp. 63–71.

Innocent Gentillet:

Bartolus, (who was a renowned doctor in the civile law) in his treatise written of tyrannie, wades no thing so deepe in the matter as Machiavell doth, although reading the treatise of Bartolus, it seemes that Machiavell hath learned a great deale of his knowledge: but Machiavell applieth it contrary, seeking, that men should hold it for good, whereas Bartolus speaketh of it as of a damnable thing, which men ought to repulse and shun with all their power: and to conferre a little thereupon, I will here summarily recite certaine points of doctor Bartolus, touching this matter of tyrannie, to shew that which Machiavell hath stolne, yet would applie it to the dutie of a prince, whereas Bartolus attributeth it to the iniquitie and mallice of a tyrant.¹⁰

Giovanni Botero:

Machiavelli has created a prince that is nothing more than the tyrant that Aristotle described in his *Politics*, with one or two modern examples in his description. He embraces all that which satisfies the cupidity, the interests, and the appetite of the princes, with no regard for justice or honesty.¹¹

René Descartes:

I think that what the author has missed most is that he has not drawn enough of a distinction between princes who have acquired a state by just means, and those who have usurped power by illegitimate means, and that he has given to *all in general* the precepts that are proposed *only* to these latter ones.¹²

Hermann Conring:

Machiavelli gives little secret advice to princes for conserving their rule and tyranny that Aristotle had not already taught in the fifth book of his *Politics*. It is almost as if the astute scholar of wickedness transcribed Aristotle and concealed his plagiarism. The difference being, however, that Machiavelli advises *all*

¹⁰ Innocent Gentillet, *Anti-Machiavel*, Geneva, 1576; translated as *A Discourse Vpon the Meanes of Wel Governing and Maintaining in Good Peace, a Kingdome, or Other Principalitie*, transl. S. Patericke, London, 1602, p. 142.

¹¹ Giovanni Botero, *Dell'officio del cardinale*, Rome, 1599, p. 63. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹² Cf. *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and transl. L. Shapiro, Chicago, 2007, p. 141 (Letter of 15 September 1646). Italics are mine.

princes, while, more justly, Aristotle had explained that this behavior was appropriate *only* to tyrants.¹³

The interpretation advanced by Nifo, Gentillet, Botero, Descartes, and Conring is obviously unacceptable: *The Prince* is not a preemptive justification of despotism, and Machiavelli is not a champion of tyranny. And yet their fundamental concern is entirely legitimate and requires a response. Why does Machiavelli never speak of tyrants? Any reading of *The Prince* must pose this question, directly confronting the bad fame that followed this work for centuries.

Trying to answer the same question, Leo Strauss suggested that Machiavelli's treatise simply demonstrates how it is inappropriate to use the tyrant in a book dedicated to a prince: in the face of political power every wise man will cynically avoid calling it by its appropriate name if he wants to reach his goal. But Strauss's interpretation is unpersuasive for the simple reason that, on the contrary, the very juxtaposition of the two types, prince and tyrant, was a consolidated topos of the 'mirrors for princes' genre from Giles of Rome (*De regimine principum*, II.2.6) and Francesco Patrizi (*De regno*, II.1) up through Erasmus and beyond.¹⁴ In fact, nothing was more reassuring for a prince than hearing that he was not a tyrant, so that in these works the presence of the antitype had a clear eulogizing function.

The solution is evidently more complicated than an anti-Machiavellian like Strauss could admit. Coming at the question from a distance, we could begin by noting that for Machiavelli tyranny is one of many cases in which the word does not correspond to the things it designates. His entire life the ex-secretary of Florence would repeat: 'for it is power that easily acquires a name, not a name power' (*Disc.* I.34). This skepticism toward words as words alone surely informed his judgment in relation to the formulas of feudal legitimacy that were so dear to the jurists of his time. This idea was not without precedent. In a passage dear to humanists as well, Seneca had maintained that behavior was more important than a title and that a tyrant was distinguishable from a king by his actions, not by the title he held.¹⁵ And, of course, it was precisely because there were legitimate princes who perversely abused their power that Bartolus constructed his probative system, in order to denounce to the pope or the emperor those who erred in the exercise of their role. The way in which Machiavelli insists on the irrelevance of titles, however, is completely

¹³ Hermann Conring, 'Introductio in Politica Aristotelis', in *Aristotelis Politicorum libri superstites*, Helmstedt 1656, p. 583. Italics are mine.

¹⁴ L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Chicago, 1958, p. 26. G. Giorgini comments on Strauss in 'The Place of the Tyrant in Machiavelli's Political Thought and the Literary Genre of *The Prince*', *History of Political Thought*, 29:2, 2008, pp. 230–56.

¹⁵ Cf. *De clementia*, III.10: 'tyrannus a rege factis distat, non nomine'.

different. Seneca speaks in this way to warn the addressee of his mirror, a young Nero, that public ceremonies and birthright alone do not make a man king, and that words like 'Caesar', 'Augustus', or 'Emperor' might conceal a criminal, whose actions are not deserving of the honors and magnificent epithets attributed him by the courtiers. Machiavelli, on the other hand, goes in the opposite direction, demonstrating how some presumed tyrants *ex defectu tituli* or even *ex parte exercitii* offer an example worthy of the utmost attention of his dedicatee, Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici.

The least contentious case is certainly Hiero, in part because here the tension between words and deeds is already there in the ancient sources. As Machiavelli writes, citing Justin: 'He had so much virtue while still a private citizen that someone who wrote about him said: *quod nihil illi deerat ad regnandum praeter regnum* [that he lacked nothing to reign but a kingdom].'¹⁶ However, something similar could be said of other figures mentioned in *The Prince*, like Nabis, or above all Cesare Borgia, who, according to Bartolus' system, would have been quite easily recognized as tyrants *ex parte exercitii* given some of the actions they had committed to consolidate their power (in particular their use of deceit to preemptively suppress adversaries). By promoting them as examples useful for Lorenzo (who with the election of his uncle as Pope Leo X had found himself in a position very similar to that of Valentino Borgia's in relation to his father, Pope Alexander VI), Machiavelli could be accused of having tried to steer the young Medici prince toward the path of despotism. In fact, according to the account of the English cardinal Reginald Pole, in the 1530s many of the Florentine readers of the *The Prince* were republicans, persuaded that Machiavelli had only tried to convince the nephew of the pope to become a tyrant because he had read in Aristotle that tyranny was the most weak and unstable form of government, thus thinking that this could be the fastest way to have the city liberated from the Medici.¹⁷

It is undeniable that in *The Prince* Machiavelli praises some rulers famous for their tyrannical actions. And so it is easy to understand the bewilderment of his first readers upon being forced to reconsider everything they believed about good and bad government. Where Machiavelli's adversaries err is in interpreting the meaning and range of *The Prince's* criticism of the treatises preceding it. The two problems are obviously closely connected, but the second one—the range of the criticism—provides the best starting point for our discussion. Anti-Machiavellians accuse *The Prince* of being an indiscriminate defense of despotism, and sometimes

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 23. According to Livy's account (*Ab urbe condita*, XXIV.4), the aging Hiero left instructions to restore the republican system in Syracuse after his death.

¹⁷ Reginald Pole, 'Apologia ad Carolum V Caesarem', in *Epistolarum Reginaldi Poli S.R.E. Cardinalis et aliorum ad ipsum*, ed. A. M. Quirini, vol. 1, Brescia, 1744, pp. 66–171.

even contemporary scholarship reiterates the idea that Machiavelli did nothing more than attribute to all politicians the traits (and the *cautelae*) that Aristotle had assigned to tyrants.¹⁸ However, Machiavelli's desire to revisit past verdicts, and to open an enormous appeals trial, does not mean that he makes no distinction and considers all rulers equal, nor does he propose amnesty for political criminals whose lack of scruple permitted them to prevail over their enemies.

Chapter VIII is decisive in this regard. Although the term 'tyrant' is never pronounced, Machiavelli—speaking of Oliverotto of Fermo and Agathocles—introduces a distinction between 'virtuous' and 'wicked' princes. The distinction is even more important when we consider that 'virtuous' (Chapter VII) and 'wicked' princes (Chapter VIII) resemble one another more than any other subgroup we encounter in *The Prince*, being the only ones to have gained power with their 'own forces'. The singularity alone of Chapter VIII within the overall structure of *The Prince* should encourage us to examine it more closely. While the other four types of 'new princes' (fortunate princes, virtuous princes, civic princes, ecclesiastic princes) are defined through the role that virtue and fortune played in their conquest of power, here a new criterion for distinguishing rulers is introduced, one that is strictly moral in nature. The reason for this shift seems clear: having re-evaluated two much-discussed figures like Hiero and Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli hurries to introduce two other rulers who greatly resemble the first pair, but fall under the category of 'wicked', and do not deserve to be included among the virtuous like Hiero, nor the fortunate like Borgia (who built his own autonomous dominion upon the pope's power)—because Machiavelli wants to make it clear that not all evil power can be justified in politics.

Writing at the height of the postmodern linguistic turn, Victoria Kahn maintained that Chapter VIII was meant to reassure the reader, following the shocking theses of Chapters VI and VII.¹⁹ Yet, more than a strategy aimed at mitigating the impact of his previous chapters, as Kahn believes, this is Machiavelli's attempt to ensure that he is not misunderstood. Anticipating what would be the standard criticism of *The Prince* for the following two centuries, he clarifies in Chapter VIII that his endorsement of Hiero, Nabis, and Cesare Borgia as models is not meant to be a negation of the distinction between good and bad rulers. The boundary simply lies in a different place from where Bartolus and the other jurists had indicated that it was.

The reception of *The Prince* in the following years demonstrates that Machiavelli was right in worrying about this point, but not explicit enough in his clarification.

¹⁸ This is A. Burd's argument in his commentary to *The Prince*, Oxford, 1891, p. 289. The same idea can be found in, among others, R. Black, *Machiavelli*, London, 2013, pp. 99–101.

¹⁹ V. Kahn, 'Virtù and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*', *Representations*, 13, 1986, pp. 63–83 (repr. in *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, eds A. R. Ascoli and V. Kahn, Ithaca, 1993, pp. 195–217).

It also shows that the scandal of seeing Hiero, Nabis, and Valentino among the positive models of governance must have disturbed his readers to the point of altering their reception of the rest of the work. And yet, Machiavelli is not reticent about this issue in *The Prince*. On the contrary, precisely in those cases where misinterpretation is the greatest risk, that is, with Agathocles and Oliverotto, he leaves no room for uncertainty. After describing the ‘wicked’ ways in which Agathocles crushed the republican institutions of his city, Machiavelli writes of the tyrant of Syracuse:

Still, it cannot be called virtue to kill one’s fellow citizens, to betray allies, to be without faith, without pity, without religion; by these means one can acquire empire, but not glory. . . . One cannot, therefore, attribute either to Fortune or to virtue what he accomplished without either one or the other.²⁰

His rejection of Agathocles as an example seems undeniable, and yet it still torments readers today. Recently, in a series of important essays that foreshadow a more complete future investigation of the theme, John McCormick attempts to readdress the issue of the Greek tyrants in *The Prince* by demonstrating how, throughout the work, Machiavelli writes admiringly not only of Hiero and (less explicitly so) of Nabis but also of Agathocles, of whom Machiavelli occasionally speaks with warm tones of admiration, above all for his military prowess.²¹ Claude Lefort, too, whose reading of this passage was very similar, underscored how many of the actions that condemn Agathocles—to ‘kill one’s fellow citizens, to betray allies, to be without faith, without pity, without religion’—were offered to Lorenzo as an example to follow in other passages of *The Prince*. The only factors, then, that would have kept Agathocles from obtaining glory were his obscure origins and the dishonorable habit of prostitution that he had adopted as a young man in order to support himself.²²

On close examination, everything hinges on the significance that we give to one simple little word: ‘glory’ (*gloria*). If, with the moderns and Nietzsche, we think that it is, at most, a noble illusion not so different from the buyable praise that always accompanies the ascent of the victorious, then Lefort and McCormick might be right. But if we believe, like the humanists and the ancients did, that Glory is something concrete, capable of cheating time and death—something very different from the acclamation of one’s contemporaries because Glory comes only when partisan passions die out, and Truth, who is the daughter of Time, finally makes her voice

²⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 31 (slightly modified).

²¹ See J. P. McCormick, ‘Machiavelli’s Greek Tyrant as Republican Reformer’, in *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy and Language*, eds F. del Lucchese, F. Frosini, and V. Morfino, Leiden/Boston, 2015, pp. 337–48.

²² C. Lefort, *Machiavelli in the Making*, transl. M. B. Smith, Evanston, IL, 2012, pp. 133–9.

heard—then there is no way we can keep Agathocles as a positive model. In the first case, 'glory' is at most the icing on the cake of the 'empire' (*imperio*); in the second, the 'empire' (i.e., mere success) is just a necessary pedestal without which the statues of great men cannot stand.

Based on what we know about Machiavelli's contemporaries and what he tells us in *The Prince*, where 'glory' is constantly indicated as the main goal of all of Lorenzo's efforts (in line with the most traditional humanistic pedagogy), we have to opt for the second solution.²³ Machiavelli's strategy becomes clearer when we keep in mind that *The Prince* was addressed to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici in an attempt to persuade him to take exceptional measures against the Florentine aristocracy, swinging from an alliance with the political elite to the people. To do so, Machiavelli must first convince Lorenzo that certain actions traditionally associated with tyrants are indispensable to 'new princes', and that resorting to them does not make one a despot. The examples of Agathocles and Oliverotto become so important because, through a close comparison with (the evidently similar) Hiero and Valentino, *The Prince* comes to demonstrate the enormous difference between the former and the latter, even if both have committed acts that, according to the jurists, would be enough to publicly qualify them both as manifest tyrants. In other words, to present Hiero and Valentino as models, it is necessary to harshly condemn Agathocles and Oliverotto, even if the recourse to violence and treason was common to the four of them.

Machiavelli's argument is an extraordinary mix of old and new ideas. The distinction between mere 'empire' and 'glory' that he uses to condemn Agathocles is in many ways similar to the traditional distinction between the personal interest that is the only aim of tyrants and the tutelage of the collective well-being that is the objective of princes. The line of distinction still exists: it has just shifted to include the new princes who, despite lacking a legitimate *titulus*, demonstrate their actions to be in the interest of their citizens, as well as the new princes who establish their governments through 'severities properly used', that is, severities 'turned to the advantage of the subjects' (a euphemism that refers for the most part to the preventative suppression of enemies who could conspire against the new power).

The true shift revolves around the categories established by Bartolus. One of the strengths of Bartolus' theory was its limited flexibility: the affirmation that a determined action—regardless of who commits it, when they commit it, or where they commit it—automatically defines a ruler as a tyrant has the advantage of providing jurists (and also citizens) with an extremely powerful means of keeping princes from committing certain actions (even with its allowance for cases of just cause).

²³ For a useful index of the various uses of this term in Machiavelli's work, see V. A. Santi, *La 'Gloria' nel pensiero di Machiavelli*, Ravenna, 1979.

However, the same mechanicalness that assured the efficacy of the process was also its weakness. And it is here that Machiavelli distances himself from the tradition of *De tyranno*.

Cesare Borgia serves as an important example in *The Prince* precisely because—despite his violent actions, treachery, and notorious immorality—Machiavelli is forced to recognize the clear success of his politics and, above all, the enormous benefit that the people of Romagna gained from the elimination of the local lords. Considered individually, Duke Valentino's actions would have made him a model tyrant, deserving of his infamy; and yet, considering them in their entirety, an unbiased observer would be forced to recognize that, from the start, Borgia had distinguished himself from simple tyrants through his dedication to the primary duty of any prince: assuring the common good.

Bartolus would have had no doubts about how to define a man who had committed the wrongs of Cesare Borgia, nor would have any jurist at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Machiavelli on the contrary wants to instill in his readers the idea that things are not so simple. According to Renaissance law, the four figures presented in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII of *The Prince*—the Greek Agathocles and Hiero, both from Syracuse, and the two lords from Romagna, Oliverotto of Fermo and Cesare Borgia—all belonged to the same execrable lineage. But is it right to lump them together in the same family? Or would it not be more accurate to conclude that, all things considered, the Agathocles-Oliverotto type has little in common with the Hiero-Valentino type?

We already know Machiavelli's answer. However, making this distinction, as *The Prince* does, means calling into question Bartolus' entire project. Machiavelli's reasoning is clear: if special political needs force men to commit certain actions, which when examined separately may appear questionable (and they often are), the significance of these actions can only be fully understood once they are judged within a more comprehensive context. This, however, means depriving Bartolus' decalogue of its principal strength; that is, its rigidity.

It is this appeal of Machiavelli's, to judge actions within their larger context, that would cause nineteenth-century readers to attribute to him the expression 'the ends justify the means'—a phrase that the Florentine himself never actually wrote, and which, up until the French Revolution, was polemically attributed to the order of the Jesuits (*finis sanctificat media* or also *cum finis est licitus, etiam media sunt licita*, as they said). Actually, in *The Prince*, more than justifying the means, the ends give us a comprehensive picture of the kind of ruler we are dealing with. That is to say, it makes us understand the difference between a vulgar tyrant, like Agathocles and Oliverotto, and a prince forced to use 'strong medicine', like Hiero and Valentino.

There are many similarities between Machiavelli's response to the Roman revolts in the *Discourses* and his approach to tyrants in *The Prince*. In each case he must confront a humanistic tradition that condemned both without making any distinction between different historical experiences. Machiavelli's first move in the two treatises is to demonstrate that under these words—'tumult' and 'tyrant'—lie many diverging phenomena that make it impossible to judge them as a single concept. In the case of tumults, Machiavelli, basing his arguments on ancient sources, is careful to make a clear distinction between the social conflicts (all positive) that accompanied the growth of Rome, and the bloody struggles that started in the first century BCE (more or less from the Gracchi on), when the old nonviolent 'modes' ceded ground to military conflicts on the battlefield between ambitious generals. By inventing the juxtaposition between the type Hiero-Valentino and the type Agathocles-Oliverotto, he does something similar with tyrants in *The Prince*. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the same authors (like Innocent Gentillet) who accused Machiavelli of transforming all princes into oppressors also accused him of having indiscriminately praised the fighting over the tribuneship after the expulsion of Tarquin the Proud and the civil wars between Sulla and Marius and Caesar and Pompey.

One of the biggest obstacles to understanding Machiavelli's work seems to be the tendency to interpret the theses of *The Prince* and the *Discourses* as a simple reversal of the classical point of view. This hermeneutic strategy was adopted first by his detractors and only later, following the Radical Enlightenment and the French Revolution, by his admirers (who saw Machiavelli as a prophet). But in both cases it is incorrect. Despite the arguments of those who would like to make him into a forerunner of class struggle, Machiavelli does not claim that all tumult is good, nor does he defend all princes who resort to strong measures against the aristocracy in order to consolidate their own power and advance their reforms.²⁴ Indeed, it is very significant that, up until the French Revolution, this reading of Machiavelli's theory of conflict was often employed to discredit his work. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Gabriel Bonnot de Mably were the first to repropose it with a positive—and completely reversed—reading, claiming that the only alternative to despotism is civil strife and that without civil strife there is simply no liberty. Similarly, before the second half of the eighteenth century, any defense of the Greek tyrants and their violent populism that did not distinguish between the depraved Agathocles and the virtuous Hiero would have been unthinkable. From this perspective, anyone who attributes such a

²⁴ On the question of social conflicts, and the chronological distinction between a good and a bad phase, see G. Pedullà, *Machiavelli in tumulto. Conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei 'Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio'*, Rome, 2011, esp. pp. 104–12; English translation by P. Gaborik and R. Nybakken forthcoming as *Machiavelli in Tumult: The "Discourses on Livy" and the Origins of Political Conflictualism*, Cambridge, 2018.

position to Machiavelli is imposing a way of thinking on the sixteenth century that only came into existence on the eve of 1789.

No matter how much Machiavelli might be willing to reconsider certain historical figures, he remains firm on one point: a good ruler must devote himself to the common good (*bonum publicum*). In classical, medieval, and humanist traditions, this conduct alone draws an adequate dividing line between princes and tyrants, and Machiavelli, in this respect, is a fairly traditional thinker. In his writings, however, single actions are given less weight than they were in the legal tradition from Bartolus on. For instance, that a statesman betrays and violates his word in order to squash a political adversary means very little to Machiavelli. Had Greek philosophy not already taught that just actions are not always just? In his *De officiis* Cicero offered many examples of this, including the one in III.25.95:

Again, if a man who has deposited money with you were to make war on your country, would you return the deposit? I believe not; for you would be acting contrary to the republic, which ought to be the dearest thing to you. In this way, many things that seem to be honourable by nature become honourable no longer through circumstance: to keep promises, to stand by agreements, and to return deposits become no longer honourable, if what is beneficial changes.²⁵

Above all, Roman law allowed for princes to commit unjust actions in cases of extreme danger. In annotating the *Corpus Juris*, medieval theorists had recognized the existence of particular situations in which good rulers were permitted to violate the law. For that matter, even Bartolus concludes his *De tyranno* admitting that it is very difficult to find a ruler who does not possess at least some despotic trait, in line with an idea already found in Giles of Rome and that would be repeated at the end of the sixteenth century by Jean Bodin in *Six livres de la République*, II.4. As Bartolus admits, any prince completely devoid of any tyrannical quality should be known rather as a demigod (*semideus*). To use the exact words of Giles in *De regimine principum*, III.2.11:

Perhaps no one is a tyrant in every respect, because evil destroys itself . . . Perhaps there are no kings who do not commit some tyrannical acts; if they were not tyrannical in anything they would be demigods. So it happens that those who command resort in part to the precautions of a king and in part to the deceptions of a tyrant.

²⁵ Cicero, *De officiis*, eds and trans. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins, Cambridge/New York, 1991, p. 137.

Moreover, we have already seen how Bartolus amends, to a degree, the rigidity of his decalogue through the notion of just cause, which creates a small breach in the fixed axiomatics of *De tyranno*. Machiavelli, however, goes further still: in his text the exception becomes less exceptional. In certain situations, even the best princes have to obey the bitter rules of power so as not to pay for their inability to adapt to unusual circumstances with a harsh defeat.

Using a metaphor from linguistics, we could say that Machiavelli shifts from a merely 'semantic' to a 'syntactic' conception of politics, in which every choice is part of a whole, and should always be contextualized within a broader system of forces and counterforces before any judgment: just like a single word in a sentence. What counts, *The Prince* cautions, is the comprehensive significance of a behavior more than the isolated action.

Of course, this is a general principle. Yet it is significant that, after calling into question the suppositions of the probative system in *De tyranno*, Machiavelli himself turns to a concrete example. Throughout his treatise he only takes an explicit position on five of the ten actions that according to Bartolus qualify a ruler as a despot, and in four of these five cases he unequivocally condemns the behavior. It should come as no surprise that the only exception regards the necessity to resort to strong medicine (*austiores medicinae*) against one's potential enemies after gaining power: that is, in the case of Lorenzo and Florence, against the aristocrats (Chapter IX). Notwithstanding Machiavelli's distinction between 'severities properly used' and 'severities improperly used' (the latter being those that are repeated over time), the legal criteria of his age would have dictated that even one such action would have been enough instantly to situate Lorenzo among the tyrants *ex parte exercitii*, but *The Prince* claims that Lorenzo would err if he failed to choose such strong remedies. In particular, according to Machiavelli, suppressing the opponents of his new, much-longed-for militia, for example, was of crucial importance in the autumn of 1513.²⁶

It is not surprising, then, that in the *Discourses*, where Machiavelli is less concerned with persuading Lorenzo to strike the aristocracy, the traditional concept of tyranny is used again in passages like this:

²⁶ During the years of the republic, one of the principle accusations of the aristocrats toward Piero Soderini was that he wanted to make himself despot of the city, and that he even saw a path to get there in Machiavelli's militia project (thanks to R. Black, 'Machiavelli and the Militia: New Thoughts', *Italian Studies*, 69:1, 2014, pp. 41–50, we now know that Soderini was perfectly aware of the power of the 'ordinanza' as an instrument of political pressure). But the accusation could be reversed, and in the *Discourses* the Florentine aristocrats (specifically the Medici) are implicitly accused of favoring tyranny; see J. Najemy, "Occupare la tirannide": Machiavelli, the Militia, and Guicciardini's Accusation of Tyranny', in *Della tirannia*, pp. 75–108.

And no one will ever be so crazy or so wise, so wicked or so good, who will not praise what is to be praised and blame what is to be blamed, when the choice between the two qualities of me is placed before him. Nonetheless, afterward, deceived by a false good and a false glory, almost all let themselves go, either voluntarily or ignorantly, into the ranks of those who deserve more blame than praise; and though, to their perpetual honor, they are able to make a republic or a kingdom, they turn to tyranny. Nor do they perceive how much fame, how much glory, how much honor, security, quiet, with satisfaction of mind, they flee from by this policy; and how much infamy, reproach, blame, danger, and disquiet they run into.²⁷

As we have seen, *The Prince* does not erase the distinction between good and bad princes. Legitimizing the arts of the lion and the fox does not imply that all the vices traditionally associated with tyrants are to be rehabilitated. And Machiavelli returns repeatedly to this point, almost as though he wanted to clarify his position immediately (in Chapter XXI) so that there would be no ambiguity after his provocative initial argument in Chapters XV through XVIII—similarly to what he had done in Chapter VIII by citing the cases of Agathocles and Oliverotto.

Beginning with Plato, tyranny had always represented something more than just a simple corrupt form of government. Classical and Renaissance authors agreed on this point: a tyrant is marked more by a psychological and moral abnormality than by a political one. A tyrant does not know how to control himself. He lives in prey to his passions, a slave to his desires. He does not possess the same rational control of his appetites that is required of adult men. And if he protects his own interests over the well-being of the citizenry, it is a result of this initial, innate intemperance that contorts all of his actions. By contrast, with the exception of the skills connected to the bottom half of his centaur nature (violence and deception), Machiavelli's good prince also possesses all of the characteristics that tradition dictates: 'great undertakings and showing himself to be extraordinary'; 'showing himself to be extraordinary in dealing with internal affairs'; 'striving in all of his actions to achieve the reputation of a great man of outstanding intelligence'; being 'a true friend and a true enemy'; 'demonstrating that he is a lover of the virtues'; 'encouraging his subjects to pursue their trades in tranquility'; 'establishing rewards . . . for anyone who seeks in any way to enrich his city or state'; 'keeping the populace occupied with festivals and spectacles'; taking account of the 'guilds and neighbourhoods that each city is divided into'; and 'offering himself as an example of humanity and munificence (Chapter XXI).'²⁸

²⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. H. C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov, Chicago, 1996, p. 31.

²⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 76–9 (with minor adaptations).

Machiavelli is firm on two points in particular: the model prince pursues the common good (not his private interests) and avoids vulgar vices, which, in addition to fostering hatred against him, can make him despised and deprive him of the majesty (*maiestas*) needed to rule the city. So, if we examine the text case by case we observe once again that the novelty of Machiavelli is not to have erased the distinction between prince and tyrant but rather to have redrawn the boundaries between the two. With the exception of lavish spending (*liberalitas*), mercy (*clementia*), and good faith (*fides*)—which it might be necessary to avoid, at least in certain situations—all of the other traditional virtues are therefore approved by Machiavelli and prescribed to his 'new prince'.

The risks of being misunderstood were clear. And despite Machiavelli's repeated attempts to prevent any hasty judgment, many misunderstood him. Evidently, no explanation, addendum, or supplementary example was enough to stave off the scandal surrounding *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.²⁹ As I have already noted, the contemporaries who censured Machiavelli's work were not ignorant. On the contrary, they knew that his argument created at least as many problems as it resolved. Independently of his intentions, by questioning the possibility of unambiguous legal criteria for judging rulers, Machiavelli provided unprincipled men with dangerous conceptual instruments: tools that could be used from then on to justify the most unrighteous of actions, thwarting the work carried out by generations of jurists invested in holding princes legally responsible for their behavior.

This immediately became more difficult for those wishing to oppose the actions of tyrants. Tyrants could now wash their hands of any crime by citing the impelling constraints of politics, the precedents and the noble objectives of their actions. Following Machiavelli's critique, the legal system suddenly found itself disarmed. This is also the reason that Nifo went as far as to compare Machiavelli to those jurists who were paid by sovereigns to supply the pretext necessary to justify their political aims. In 1526 the philosopher would write another treatise in which he offers a reading of Machiavelli, blaming the recent Italian crisis on those men of the law who agreed to corrupt the same law to the benefit of their patrons.³⁰ From the rest of Nifo's writings we come to understand that for him Machiavelli embodied one particularly immoral exponent of this dangerous breed.

²⁹ A large part of the entry 'Machiavel' in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 2nd exp. ed., vol. 2, Rotterdam, 1702, pp. 1958–63, is dedicated to combating the false accusation that Machiavelli was a supporter of tyranny. Bayle, however, argues that Machiavelli's ideas can be found in Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Bartolus, and as such are not so scandalous. He overlooks the fact that in these cases the authors associated the ideas with tyrants alone, and not with the good prince as well.

³⁰ Cf. *De rege et tyranno*, Naples, 1526, II.5: 'Per causidicos mundus fere totus in tyrannidem versus sit' [Because of the *causidici* almost the whole world had fallen to tyranny].

How, then, should we interpret the disappearance of the tyrant? Since Machiavelli never maintained that the ends (understood as the result) justify the means, it is an error to imagine he believed that yesterday's and today's actions could be excused by an advantageous tomorrow. Rather, Machiavelli showed that he understood that the various tesserae come together to form a complete figure only at the end—an awareness that is even more striking if we admit that politics involves making day-to-day decisions in a context in which the final role of each political player is often unclear. This is all the more so as Truth, the daughter of Time, risks arriving too late to be useful in these situations.

Stressing the impossibility of relying on an external, unalterable system of signs, Machiavelli is forced to recognize the nonexistence of a guiding compass. For this reason, one of his characteristic themes will be the politicians' difficulty in judging correctly their tendency to let themselves be led by appearances. As we read in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*: 'Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands.'³¹ Machiavelli's new system avoids the errors of Bartolus', but it makes the process of interpretation more subtle and difficult: so much so that what we gain in terms of understanding, we lose in terms of immediate practical efficacy—unless this ambiguity is counterbalanced by a resolute bet on the future, like the one that *The Prince* proposes to Lorenzo in Chapter XXVI.

The differences remain in place, but they are now more difficult to grasp. A politics of the gray zone begins with Machiavelli, one in which the true identity of the good prince and the bad prince is known to only a handful of experienced men capable of going beyond appearances. But even these experienced men will be continually forced to ask themselves on which side the political rulers belong. Do they protect their own interests alone? When they claim that an action is a necessity, is this merely an alibi? Or are they really fighting for their sake of their citizenry when they commit actions that we would otherwise consider repugnant?

Political modernity—if this term still carries meaning today—coincides with this condition of radical uncertainty. Indeed, when a great reformer and a bloodthirsty despot follow the same rules of worldly shrewdness, making them indistinguishable and leaving us wondering what lies behind the mask, we are forced to recognize that we are the children of Machiavelli: forced, like him, to depend on insubstantial clues that speak to us of a future that may never arrive.

³¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 62.

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